

# God of the Marginals

Part 2 The Patriarchal cycle  
and Exodus stories

by Andrew Parker







# GOD of the MARGINALS



## Part 2 The Patriarchal Cycle and Exodus Stories

*God of the Marginals* is the second volume in *The Bible in Cartoons* series. The first volume was an introduction to the Bible. Both volumes can be found on the following website:

<http://bibleincartoons.com>

Hard copies of *God of the Marginals* can also be purchased on <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore>



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## INTRODUCTION

This book is from my 'Bible in Cartoons' series. It is the second part of volume 2 which is entitled 'God of the Marginals'.

The first volume in this series - 'An Introduction to the Bible' - shows that the mythical texts from the ancient Near East, though couched in religious language, are in fact political works designed to sell the world views of their conservative authors.

In part 1 of 'God of the Marginals' my friend John and I examined the Genesis and Exodus stories from a political point of view. We found them to be revolutionary texts putting forward the world view of the Hebrew marginals. However, we also unfortunately discovered that these revolutionary texts have been edited by later conservative priests who have done their best to cover up this unsettling Hebrew/marginal picture of the world.

In this book, as we continue our hike, John and I now turn to the great Patriarchal and Exodus stories.

The reader of this book should be aware that if I portray a figure in black-and-white that means he or she is a representation not a historical character.

For example in Volume 1 I introduced a character called Ancient Man whom I drew in black-and-white.




I did this to make it clear that he represents the ancients and wasn't to be mistaken for a historical person. In this book I 'draw' some biblical characters in black-and-white and others in colour. This should not be taken as suggesting that I believe the ones in colour actually existed. They may have, but that is not the point. If they appear in colour it only means the Bible presents them as historical characters. Alternatively, if they appear in black-and-white that means the Bible presents them as representations and not as real live people who actually existed long ago.



1

# Yahweh's Promise





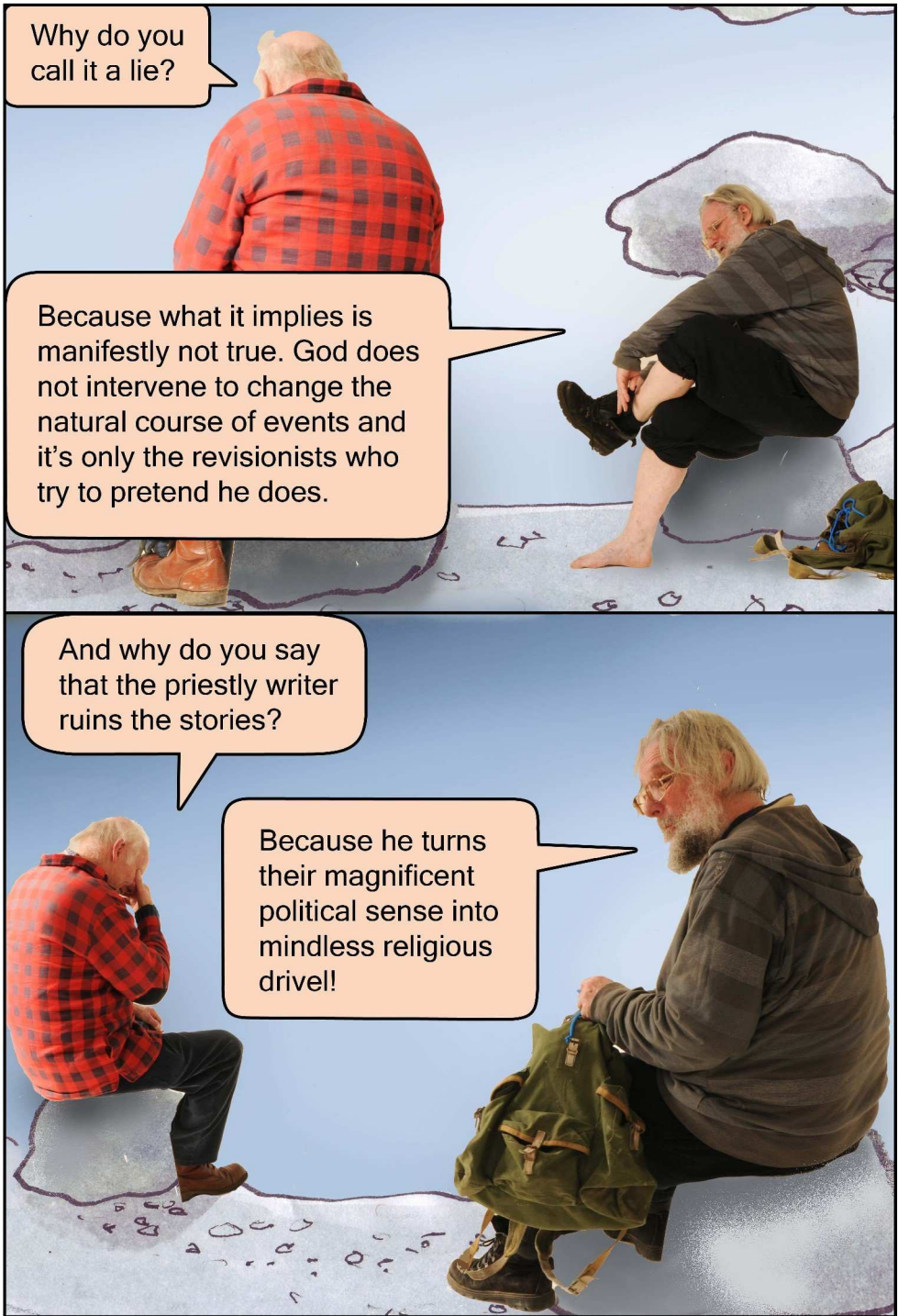
Right, I'm ready  
to move on to the  
Patriarchal stories.

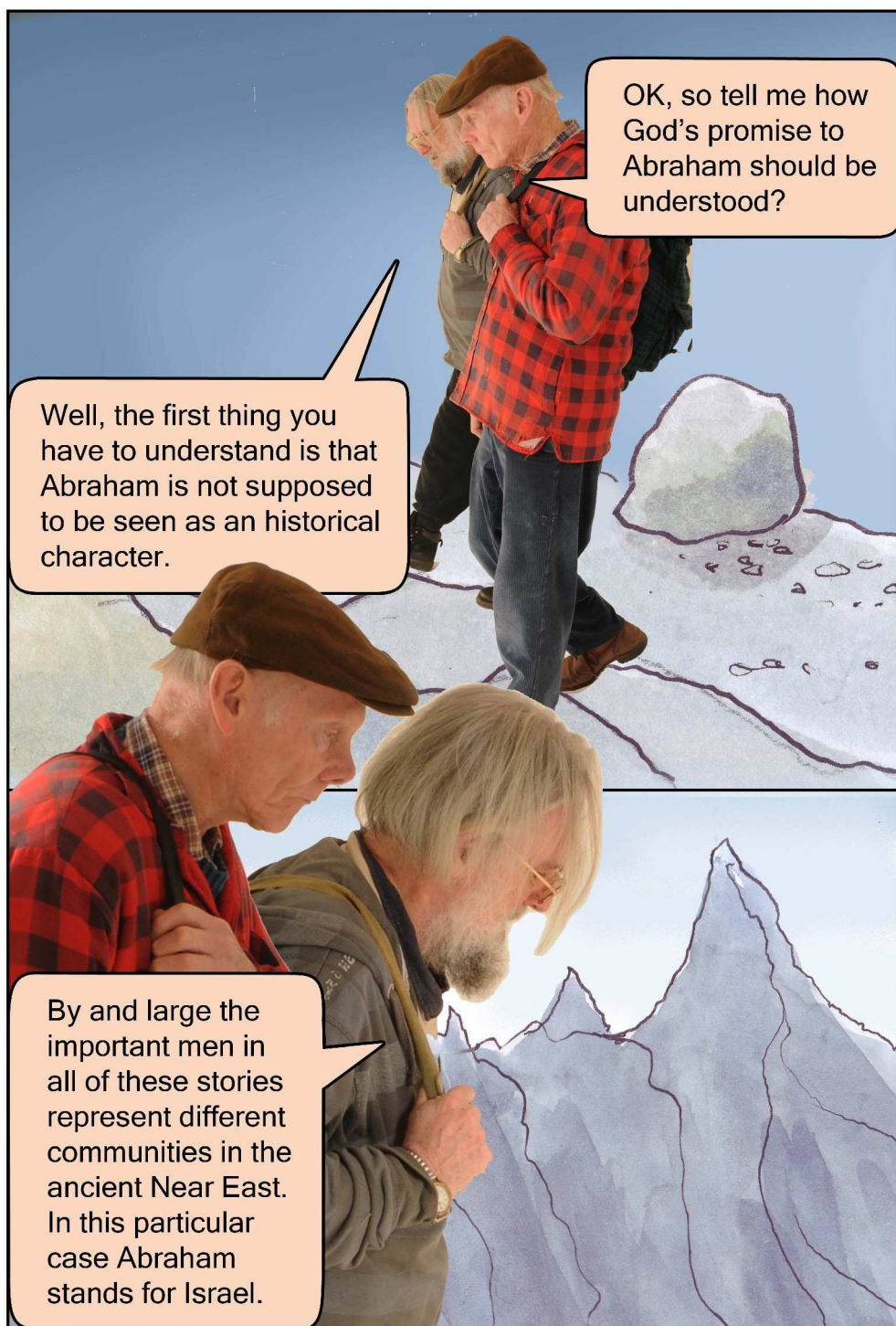
OK, but first we must  
look at the introduction,  
which deals with  
Yahweh's promise.

Gen 12. 2-3

Everyone knows about  
that. God promises to  
help Abraham so long  
as he trusts him and  
does what he is told.

That's the priestly writer's  
conservative gloss. He wanted  
people to believe they should  
blindly obey. However, it's a lie,  
which ruins the stories.



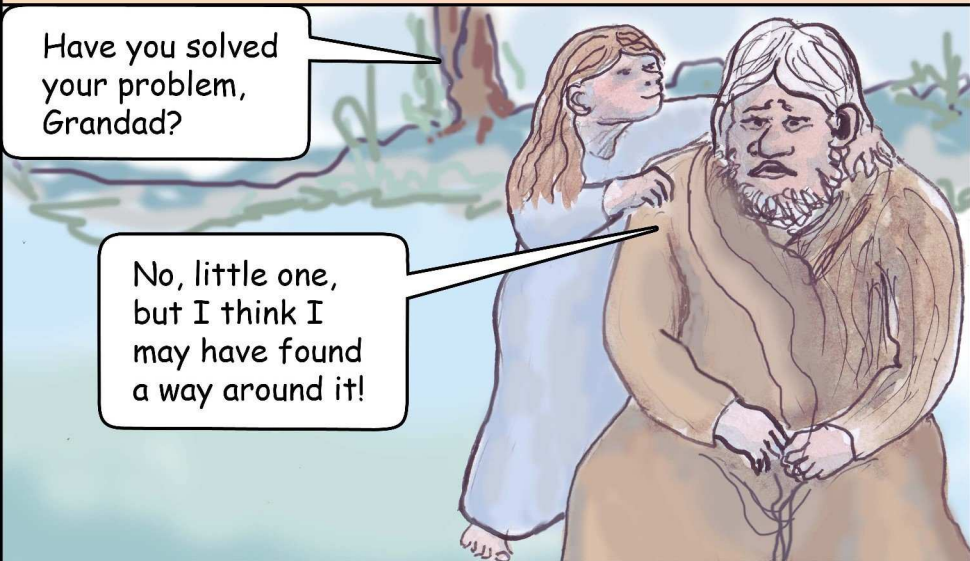




You have to remember that, having little abstract vocabulary, it was impossibly difficult for the ancients to think about and accurately describe how human communities operated.



However, using this new corporate-personality technology, they managed to talk about the political dealings between communities as relationships between individuals.

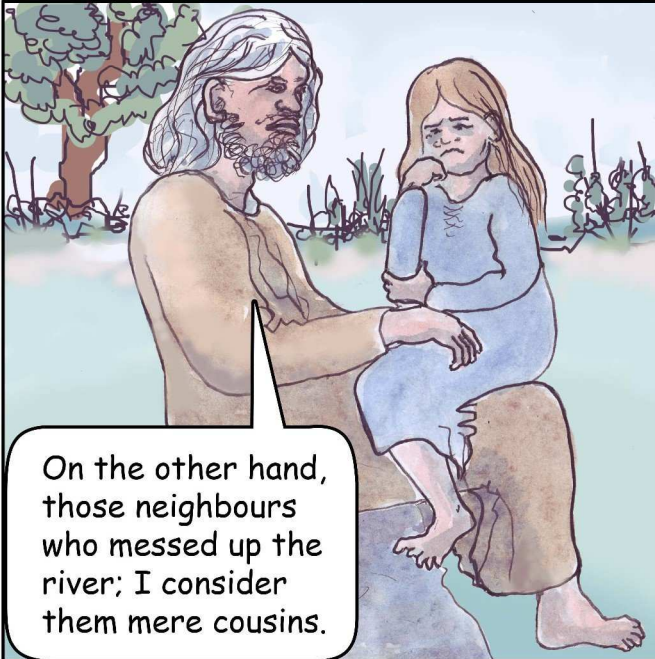






In this way, where contacts were friendly, the relationship between two communities would quite naturally be described as fraternal.





On the other hand, those neighbours who messed up the river; I consider them mere cousins.

However, if there were problems of a minor sort in the relationship, the talk would be cooler and more distant.

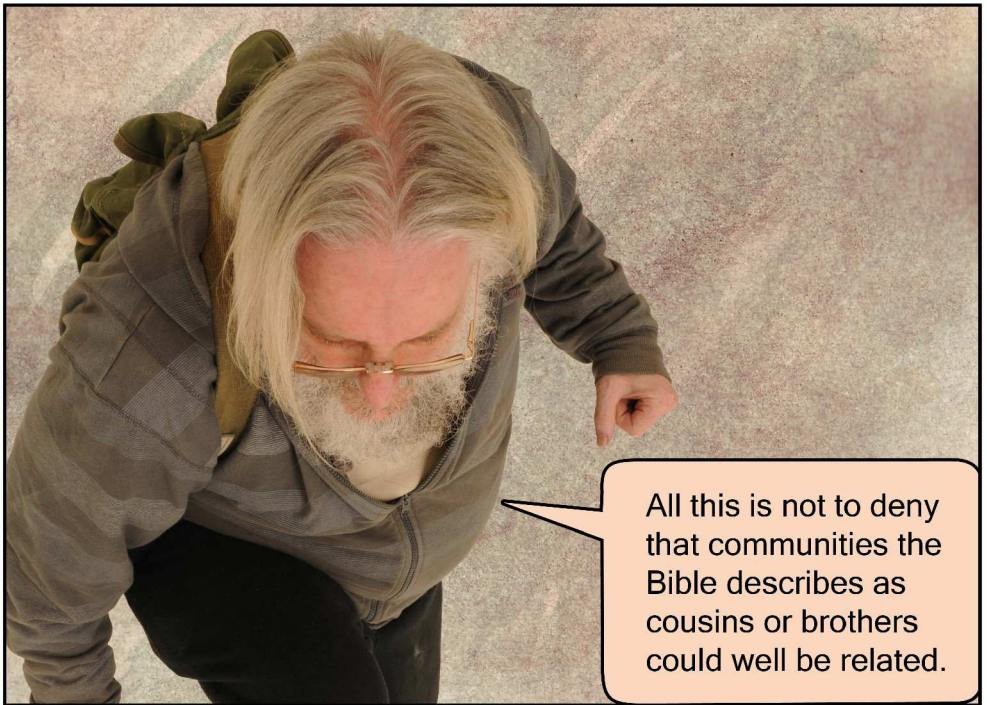
Grandad, what about the people who kidnapped my sister Sarah?

As for outright ideological hostility, it would have been described as a lack of any affinity in the relationship.

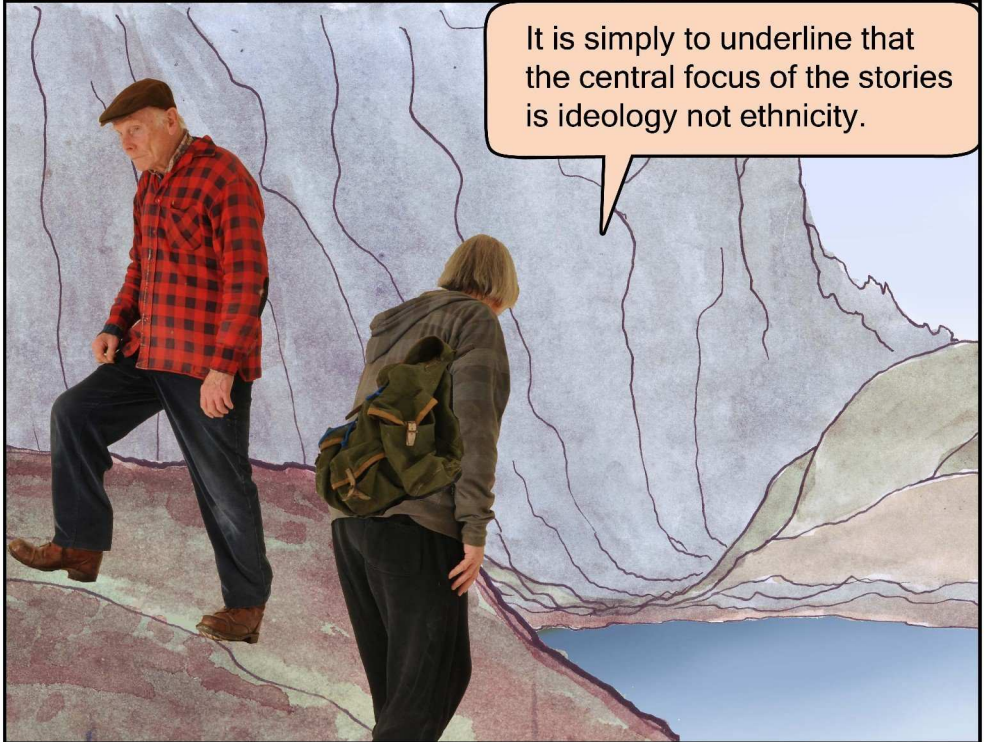


I don't know little one. For me they don't exist!

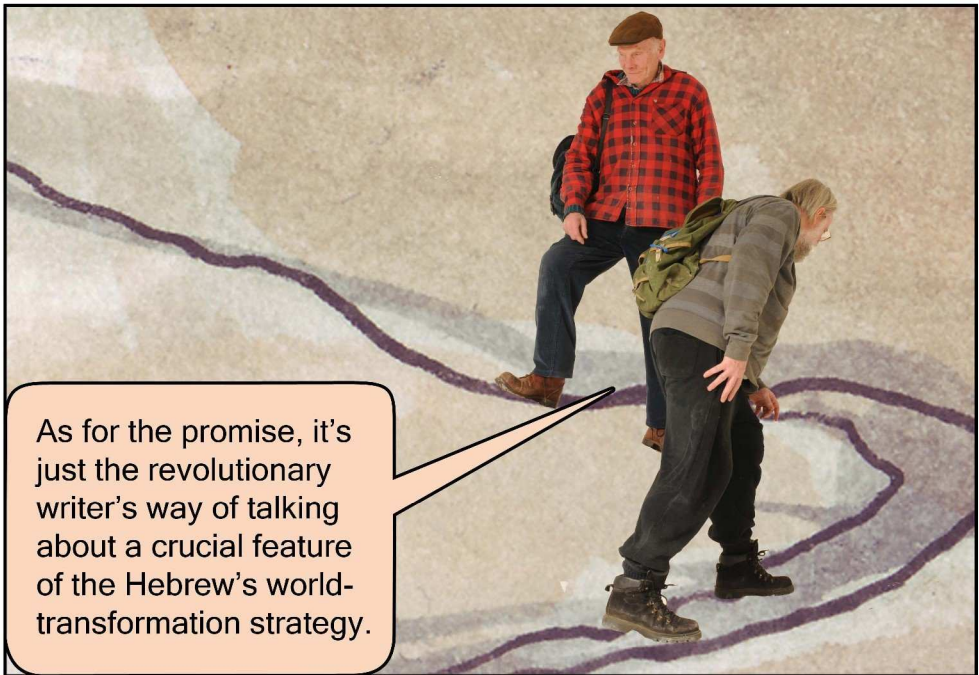




All this is not to deny that communities the Bible describes as cousins or brothers could well be related.



It is simply to underline that the central focus of the stories is ideology not ethnicity.



As marginals the Hebrews had no hope of changing society by force. They therefore had to rely on shaming civilisation.





This meant they had no control over events and had to do their stuff simply hoping against hope it would work.



Yahweh's promise is that when the time comes he will see to it that the strategy does indeed work. This constitutes the basis, whether real or imaginary, of the revolutionary writer's faith.



Of course, as I have pointed out, the Hebrews possessed no political vocabulary. So they were unable to talk directly about a strategy designed to shame the world to its senses, as I do.



Instead they spoke about a covenant agreement which obliged them to stand up for themselves, confident that Yahweh, for his part, would fulfil his promise and soften Gentile hearts.






These marginals could not have foreseen that, later, revisionist priests would deliberately obscure what they had said by presenting their stories in a way that suggested revolutionary change was unnecessary.



They would have been dumbstruck had they known their stories were going to be used to teach that Israel could get along very well under enlightened conservative leadership, leaving Yahweh to magically do the rest!



Note: Moses is shown here in colour since the Bible presents him as an historical individual.



But please don't  
take my word for  
it. Let's see if a  
marginal reading  
of the stories  
rings true!

OK, I'm  
happy to  
do that.

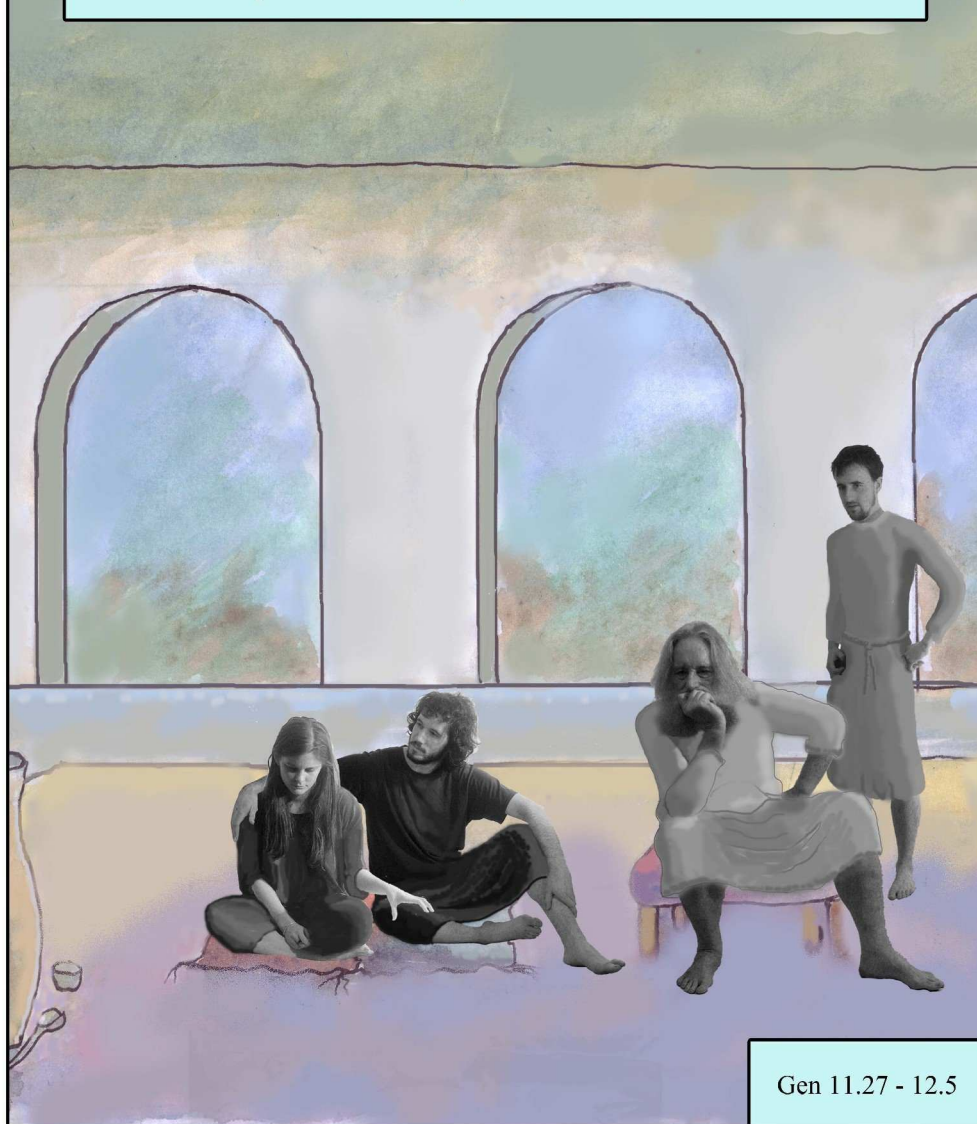
2

# Abraham the Marginal



In the beginning we find Abraham living with his father Terah and his nephew Lot in the famous Mesopotamian city of Ur.

Note: The characters in the following stories are shown in black and white since the Bible presents them as representations not as historical individuals.



Gen 11.27 - 12.5

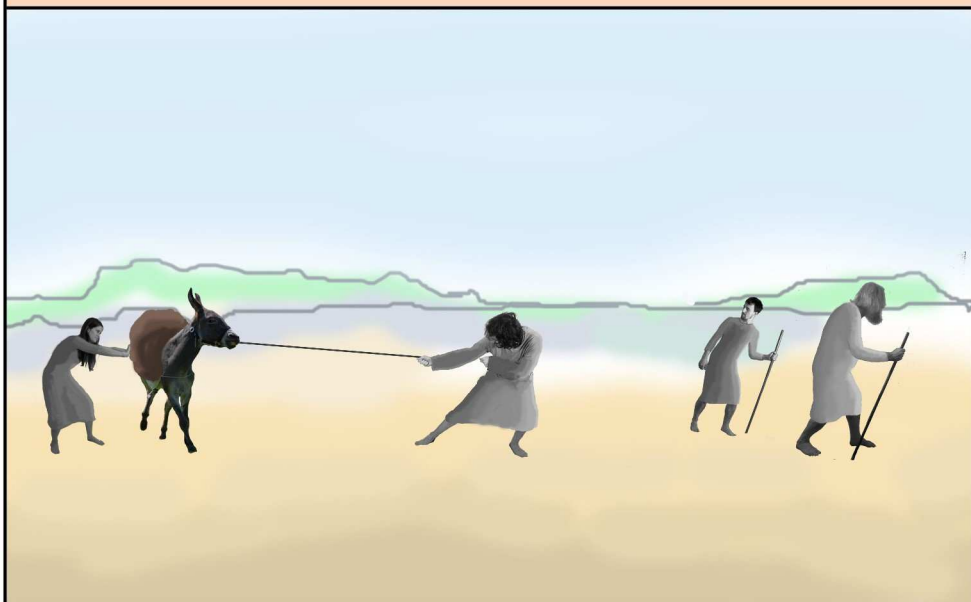


However, clearly something happens, for suddenly Terah decides to uproot his family and move to the back of beyond in Canaan, a move no one would voluntarily contemplate.

I'm sorry folks. We're going to have to leave.

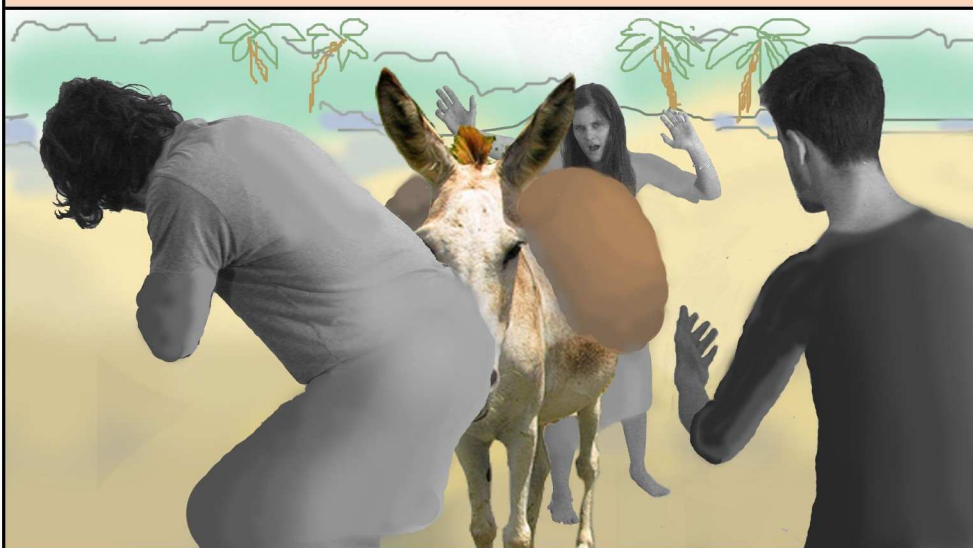


Though the text does not actually call Terah a Hebrew the implication is clear. For some unspecified reason his enterprise has failed and he has no choice but to leave Ur and civilisation.





However, strangely, Terah never gets to Canaan. Instead he settles in the city of Haran where, eventually, he dies. Now it is Abraham's turn to fail and become a marginal.



*The LORD had said to Abram,*

"Leave your country, your people  
and your father's household and  
go to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation  
and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you  
I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

This is a  
crucial text,  
expressing  
the marginals'  
revolutionary  
objective:  
**blessedness**  
which will come  
about **world wide**  
as a result of  
peoples'  
**free decision**  
to change their  
attitudes and  
behaviour.

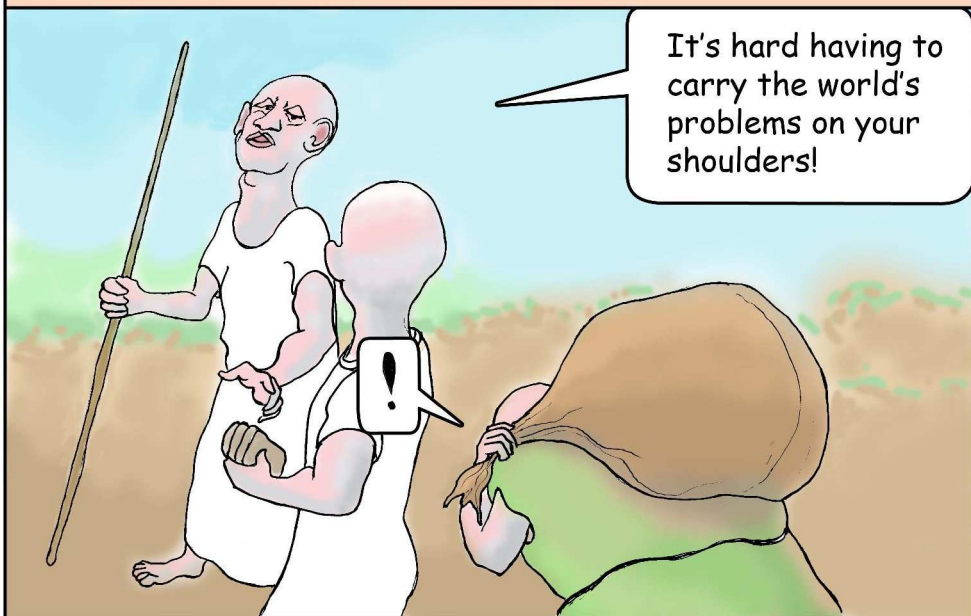
Of course the revisionists couldn't accept this. As right-wing nationalists they dreamed of a Davidic world empire imposed by force, with themselves as its administrators,

Make way! Make way for  
the chief Administrator!



They therefore edited the text to try and persuade people that this universal blessing promised by Yahweh would be a PAX DAVIDICA ... a precursor of the PAX ROMANA.

It's hard having to  
carry the world's  
problems on your  
shoulders!



But, if you know what they were up to, it is not difficult to see through their duplicity since there is nothing of a Sargon - a right wing hard man on the make - in the Bible's portrait of Abraham.

What's the problem ?


Well I can't help thinking that, in humbly accepting his fate, this guy Abraham was a bit of a whimp .

So what are you going to do about it?

Hide it under a smoke screen of religion. It never fails!

As it stands, the text appears to 'explain' Abraham's decision to uproot his family as the result of a religious calling, but this again is just revisionist eyewash.





I'm sorry but, labelling Abraham's call 'revisionist eyewash', is not an argument. You may not like it but a religious call is in the text.

It may be in the text but its purpose is only to change the sense.

Why do you say that?

Well, think about it. What we have in this speech from Yahweh is covenantal 'promise' language which works along the lines that **if you do this then I promise to do that.**



As previously noted, in its original revolutionary form the covenant was an agreement between the Hebrew marginals and the god of the marginals, who represented their interests.

The situation is not complicated. You have to stand and I exercise

**Here we go Again!**

In this revolutionary context, the idea of Yahweh's promise acted as a spur to urge on the marginals to revolutionary endeavour.

It's no good. It'll never work!

Don't forget Yahweh has promised!

However, the priestly editor cleverly got rid of all of this by saying Yahweh spoke to Abraham **before** he became obliged by circumstances to leave.



In this new scenario there's no question of Abraham becoming a marginal. Moreover, Yahweh's promise is the opposite of a spur to endeavour. It's a demand that the community should give its conservative leaders a blank cheque by blindly obeying them.



In the priestly writer's post-exilic context this meant all initiative was to be placed in the hands of Israel's new leadership, to which he himself belonged.

Ah Yes! Most convenient!

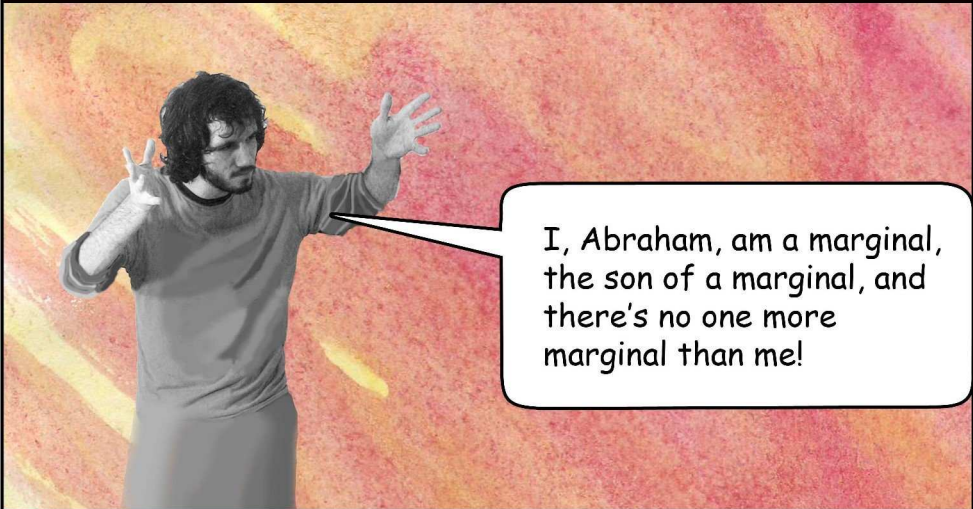
You can tell a mischievous editor has altered the story by the loose ends he has left behind. If the point was Abraham's religious calling why write about Terah leaving Ur, or are we supposed to infer he too was called?

Why are we leaving Ur?

Sorry didn't I tell you? I got this call!



In fact, of course, the revolutionary Hebrew writer, in speaking about Terah, only wanted to establish Abraham's credentials as a marginal by explaining that his father had been one too.

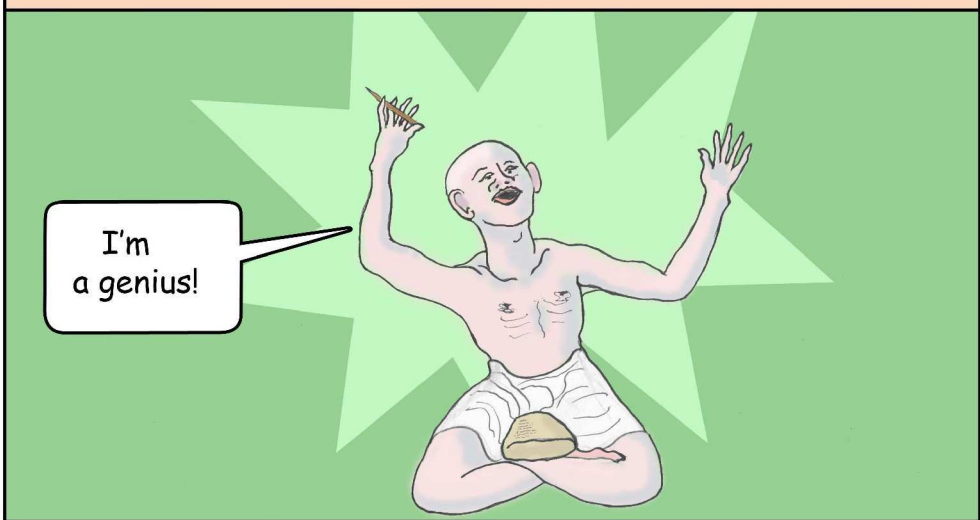


That is why he describes Terah as leaving Ur only to stop him in his tracks, for no apparent reason, at Haran. That way he can go on to describe Abraham too as being marginalised in his turn!





As for the priestly editor, see how clever he was. He managed to get rid of the god of the marginals simply by suggesting Yahweh spoke to Abraham **before** he failed and became a marginal



I'm  
a genius!

Of course the conservative construct thereby created - the religious calling - was superstitious clap-trap but that didn't matter, for human beings have always been gullible!



Do you  
think you'll  
get away  
with it?

Of course!  
You'll see.  
They'll love it.



# 3

## Abraham in Egypt

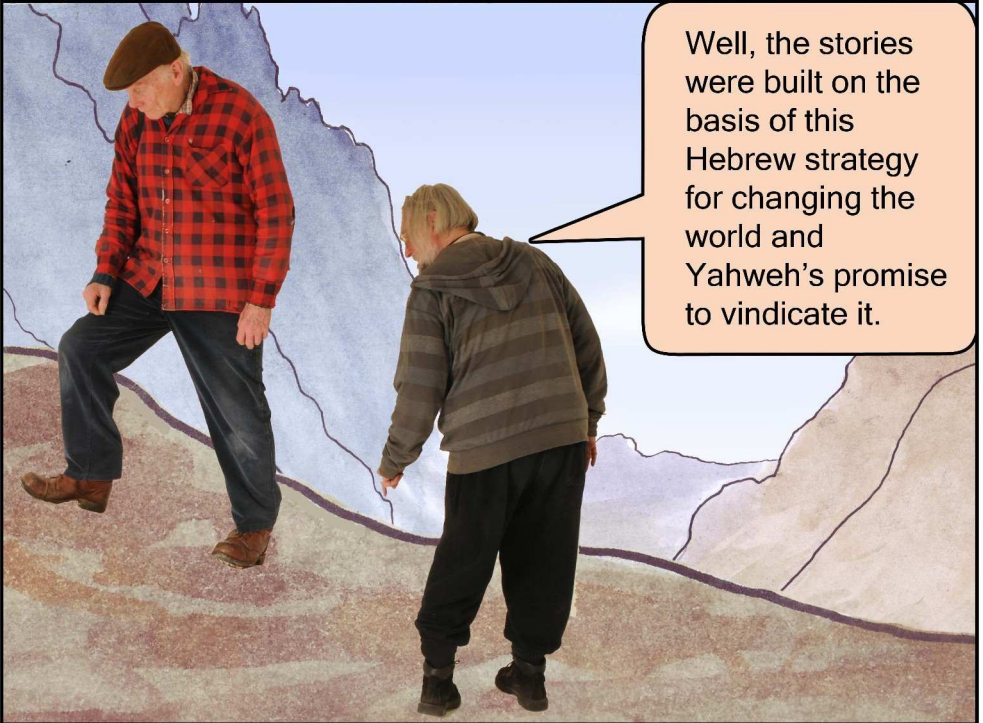




OK. So Yahweh's promise is designed to spur Israel on to marginal revolutionary endeavour. But how does this promise connect with the patriarchal stories?



Well, the stories were built on the basis of this Hebrew strategy for changing the world and Yahweh's promise to vindicate it.





I propose, therefore, that we read them as accounts of how this Hebrew strategy panned out in the different geo-political situations which the early Israelite community experienced.

OK. Maestro, take it away!

Right then. Give us a run down of the Abraham-in-Egypt story.

It's pretty much a shorthand account of the Exodus.

Gen 12.10-20



As usual, famine forces the Hebrews to take refuge in Egypt...



News of the arrival of the beautiful Hebrew woman soon reaches the palace and Pharaoh orders her to be taken into his hareem.

At the same time Abraham is lavished with gifts and does very well for himself.





But Yahweh inflicts serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abraham's wife.



When Pharaoh realises what's going on he orders Abraham to explain himself.



Pharaoh orders Abraham to pack his bags, take Sarah and leave before Yahweh has time to do any more damage.



So how do you read this story!

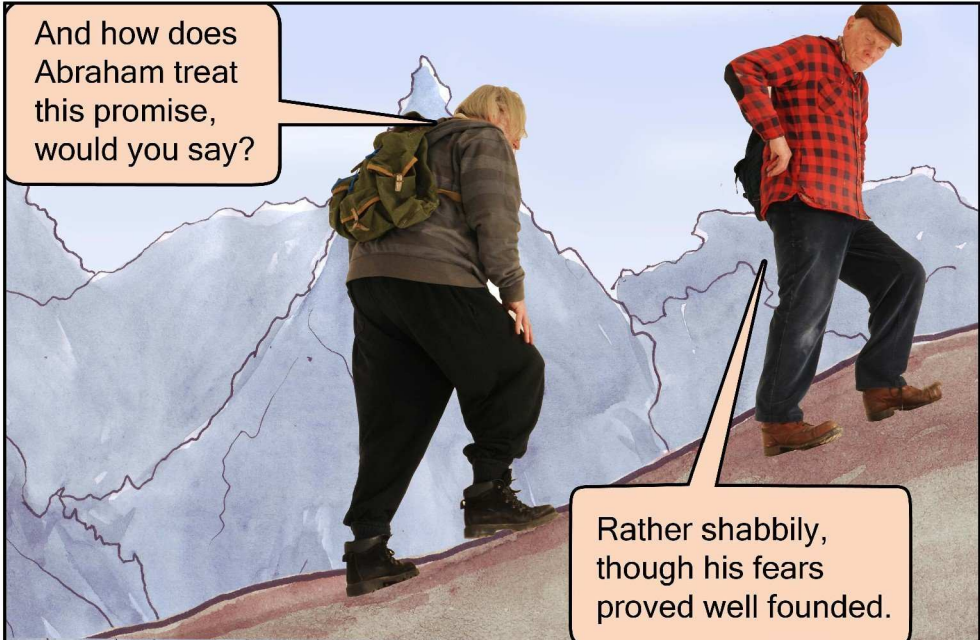
Well, for me it's all about how Yahweh uses his magic to rescue his servant; however, I realise you're not going to go along with that!







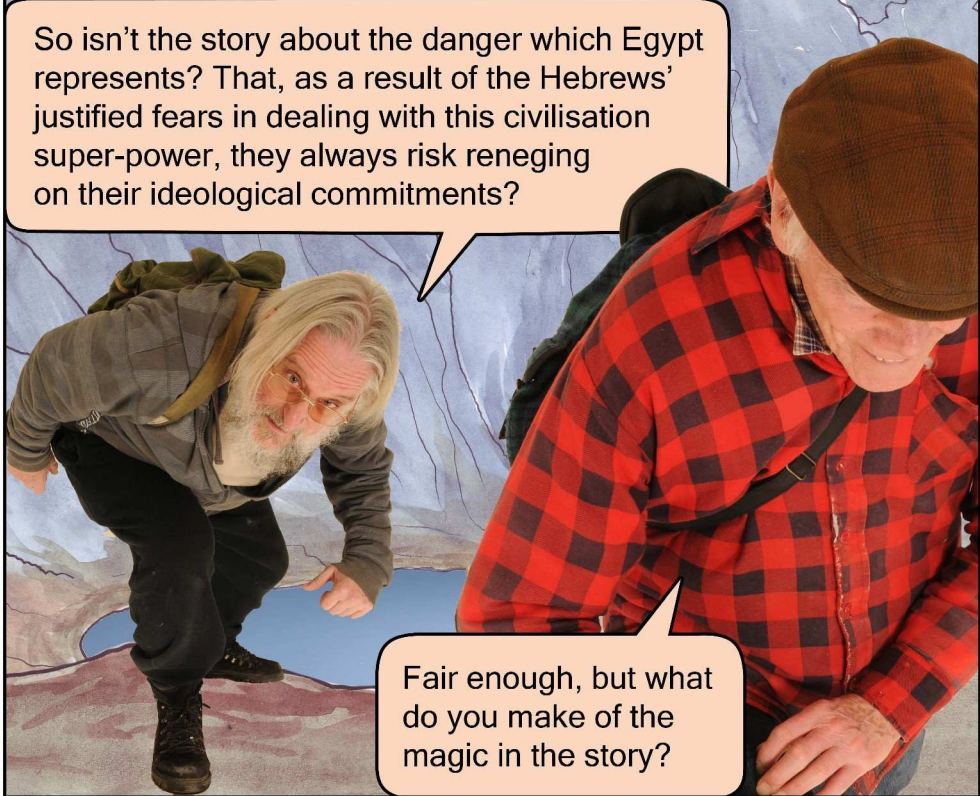




And how does Abraham treat this promise, would you say?

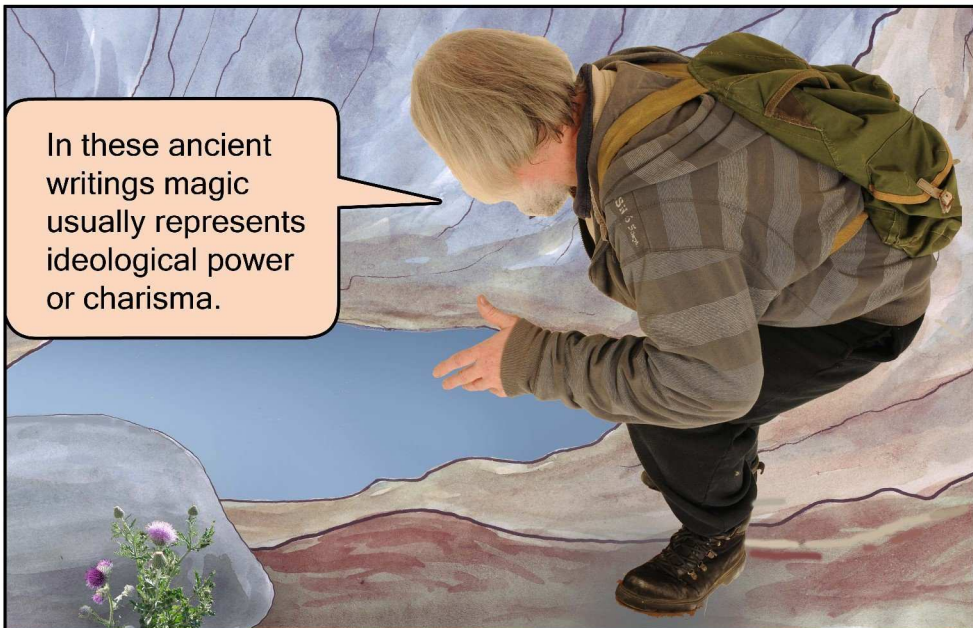
Rather shabbily, though his fears proved well founded.

So isn't the story about the danger which Egypt represents? That, as a result of the Hebrews' justified fears in dealing with this civilisation super-power, they always risk reneging on their ideological commitments?



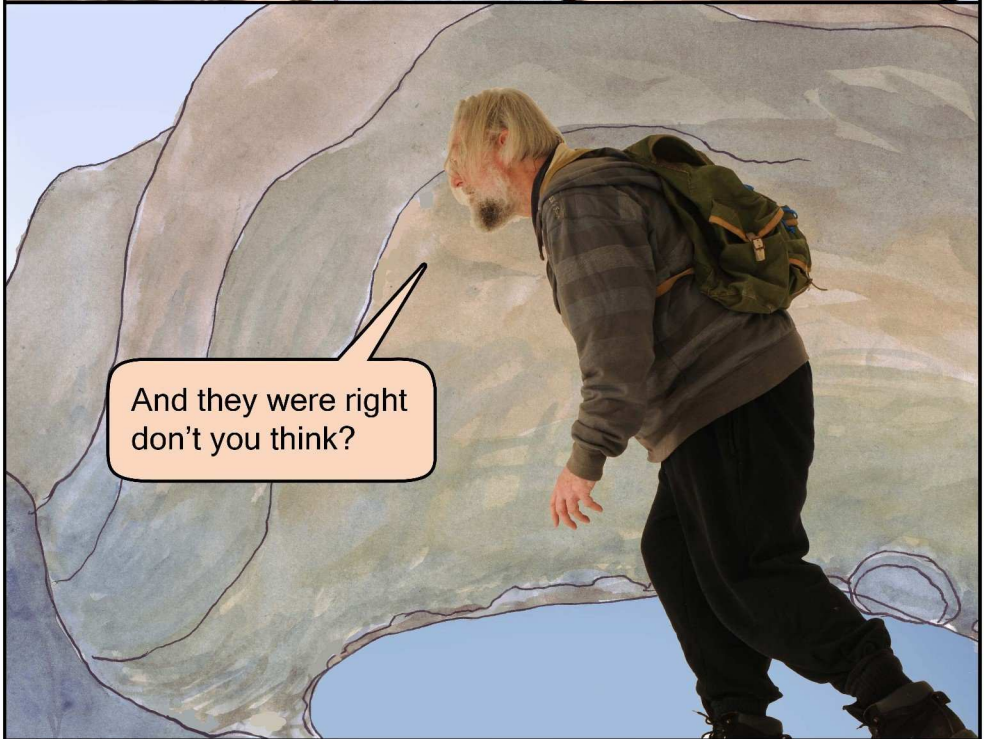
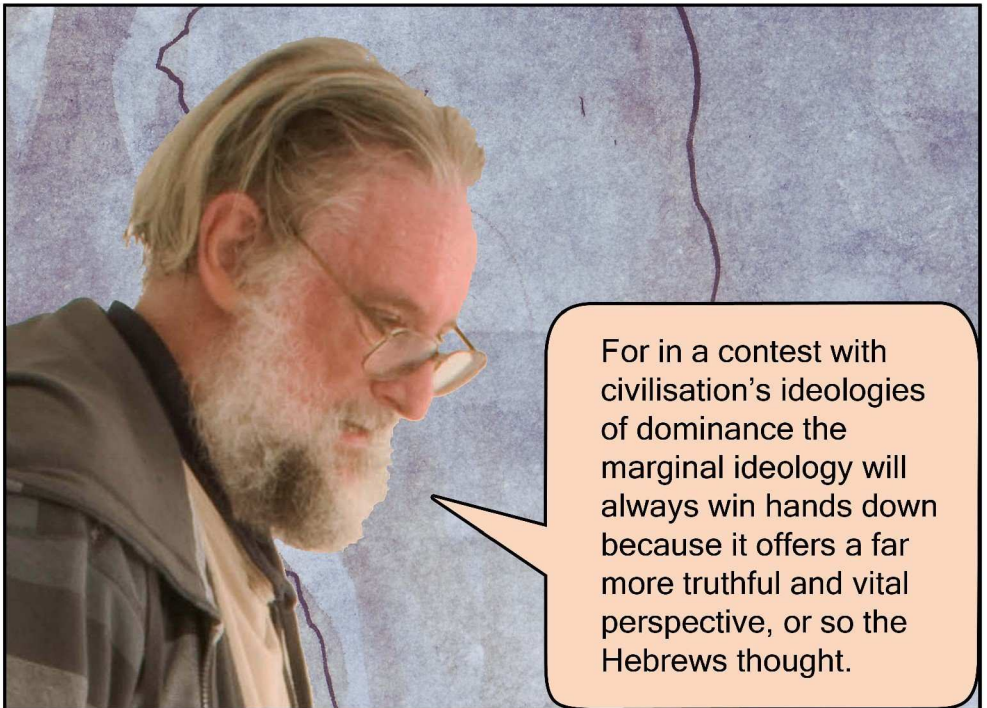
Fair enough, but what do you make of the magic in the story?





Here the point being made is that though Egypt constitutes a terrible danger for the revolutionary marginals it presents no kind of danger for the marginal ideology itself.









If you're suggesting the story was originally about a magical power which altered the natural course of events, so defying universal laws, then I'd have to say the evidence is against it.



However, if you're asking me whether the story was originally produced by a group of ideologically inspired Hebrew marginals who, unbelievably, started to stand up for themselves ...



... but, finding the Egyptians obdurate, ended up doing a spectacular bunk ...

What have we got to lose ?



...which against all the odds was successful ... thanks almost entirely to their ideological stiffening ...

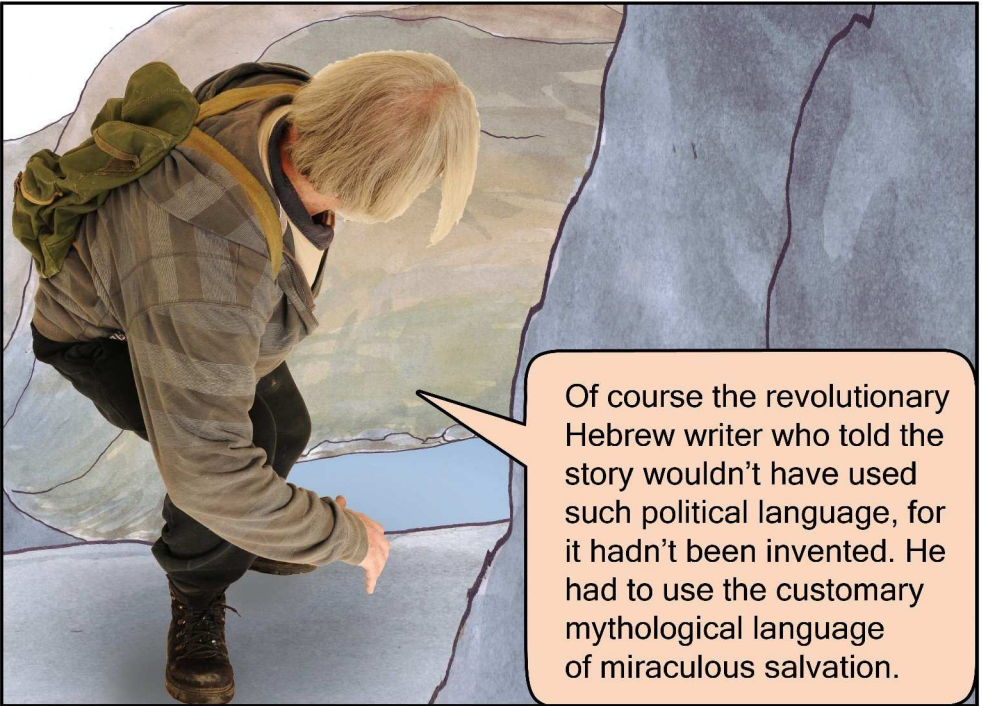
Phew!

Surely we weren't responsible for that?

No  
Yahweh  
was!

Ex 14.30

... then I would have to say the  
evidence suggests you're right.



Of course the revolutionary Hebrew writer who told the story wouldn't have used such political language, for it hadn't been invented. He had to use the customary mythological language of miraculous salvation.

But we shouldn't take this as implying he was speaking religiously, for the chances always are that he wasn't.

Hi folks! I'm Ancient Man. Is it true that because we used myth-talk you people think we spoke about religion ALL THE TIME?

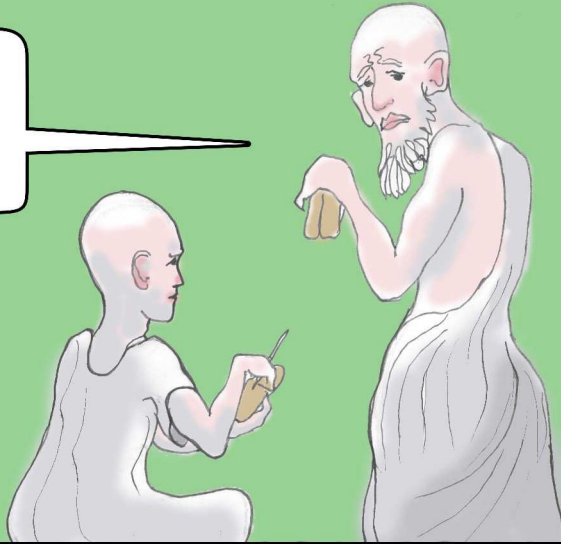


Must think we were daft!



It's much more likely it was a revisionist editor who later sought to present the story as conservative religion because he wanted to bury the objectionable things the Hebrew writer had said.

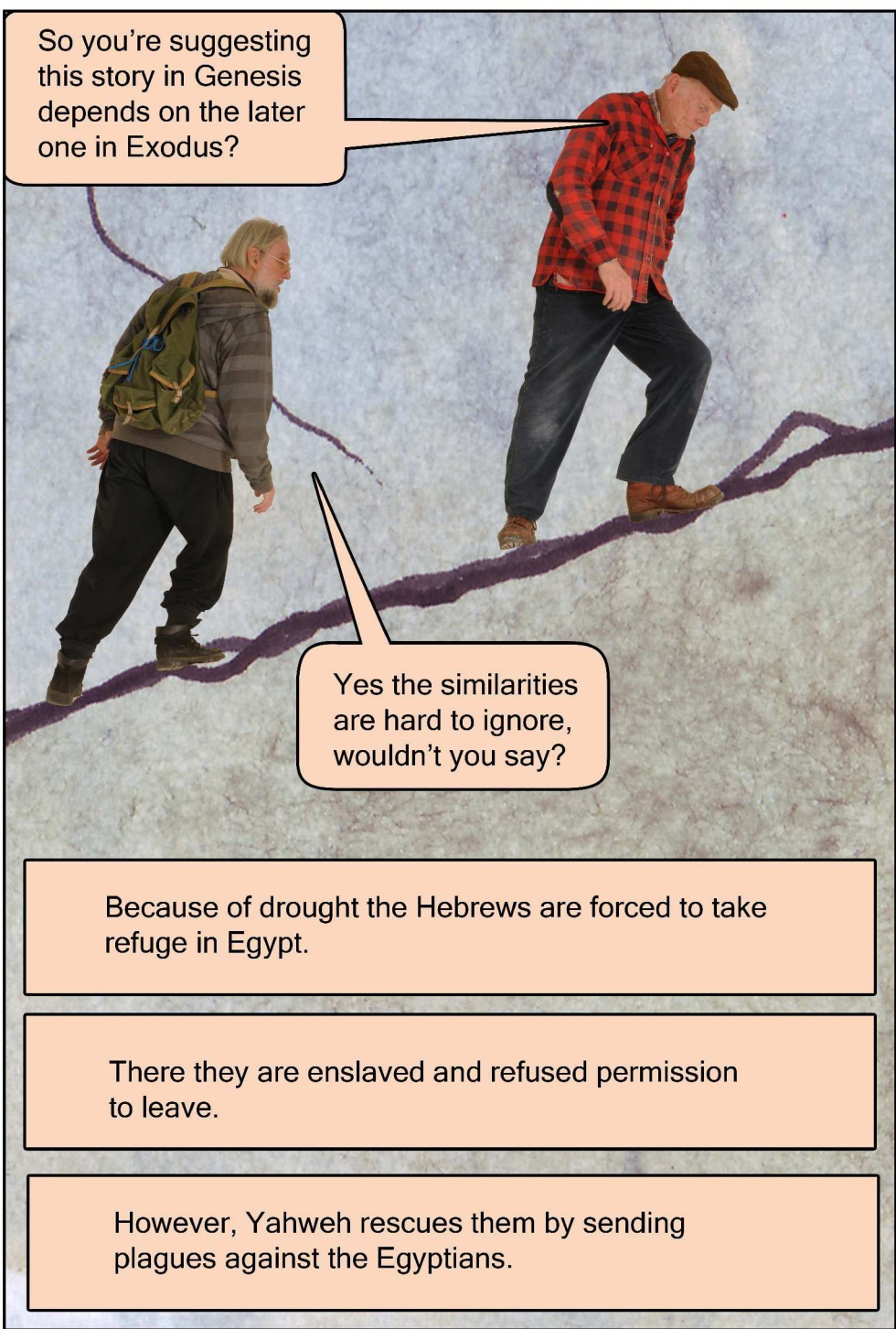
Is he **STILL** there telling lies about us!



That's an awful lot to swallow!

Not really. You see I'm not proposing changes to the story. I'm simply pointing out it makes far better sense when read using marginal rather than conservative spectacles.



A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a grey jacket and a green backpack, is walking on a purple line. He is looking towards the right. A man in a red and black plaid shirt, dark pants, and a brown cap is walking on the same purple line, slightly ahead of the first man. He is looking down at the line. The background is a light blue, textured surface. There are three speech bubbles and three text boxes on the page.

So you're suggesting  
this story in Genesis  
depends on the later  
one in Exodus?

Yes the similarities  
are hard to ignore,  
wouldn't you say?

Because of drought the Hebrews are forced to take  
refuge in Egypt.

There they are enslaved and refused permission  
to leave.

However, Yahweh rescues them by sending  
plagues against the Egyptians.



Before we leave the story I would like to note one thing further:  
It's short and cold. The Egyptians are not spoken of as brothers  
or cousins and the hostility within the relationship is thinly veiled.



It's as if the Hebrew writer was letting his readers know that,  
apart from the danger entailed, there was nothing for Israelites  
to learn from their relationship with the Egyptian enemy.



For though the final objective had been to change the world\*, by softening Pharaoh's Egyptian heart, this had not happened.

\* The writer's world:  
the ancient Near East.

What does  
it matter.  
The dogs  
escaped!

D'you think  
we hit them?

Good riddance!

And in any  
case it was  
a process  
in which the  
Egyptians  
themselves  
would have  
played no part.

Yes there's no  
shortage of  
their kind!

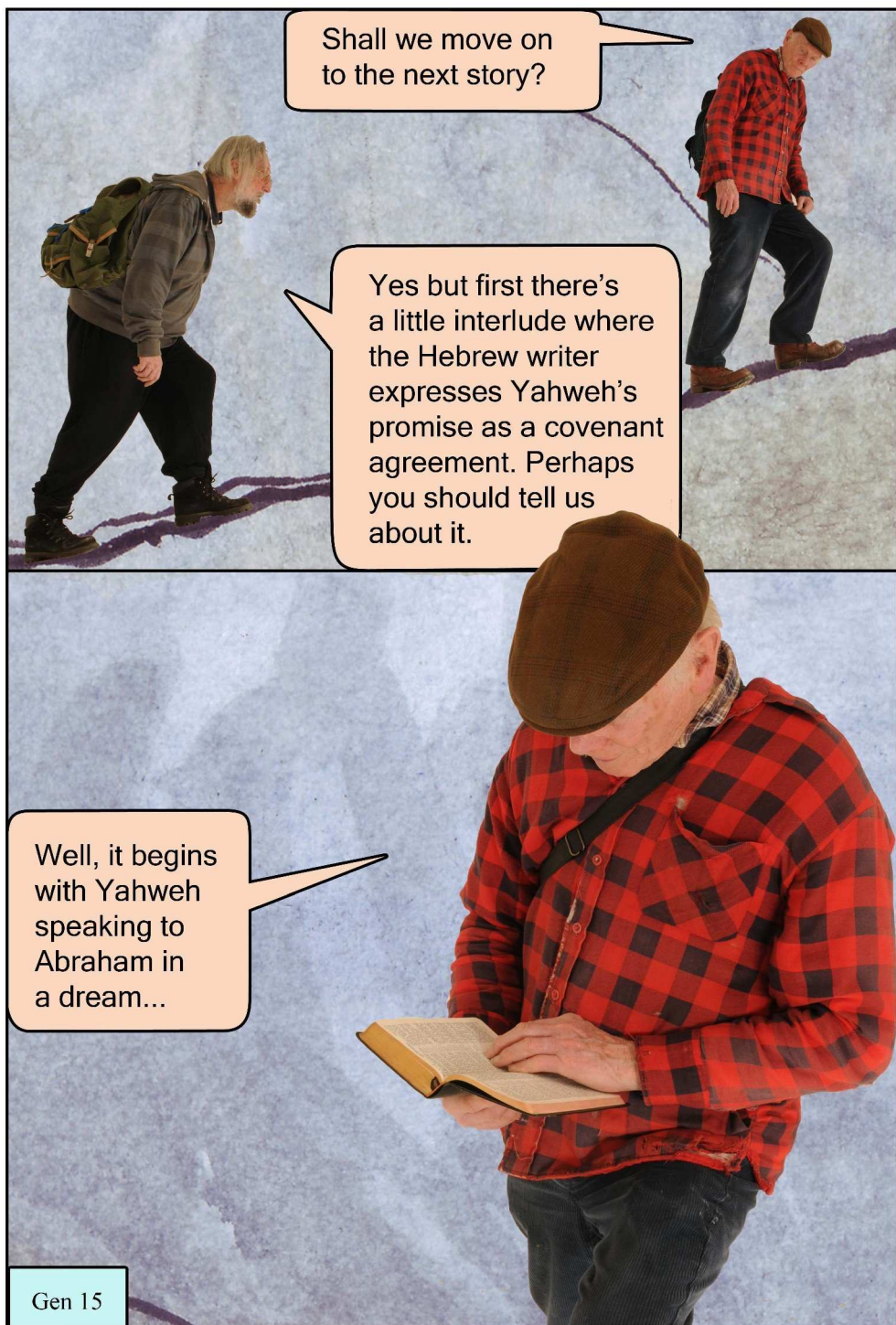


# 4

## Abraham's Covenant with Yahweh







Shall we move on to the next story?

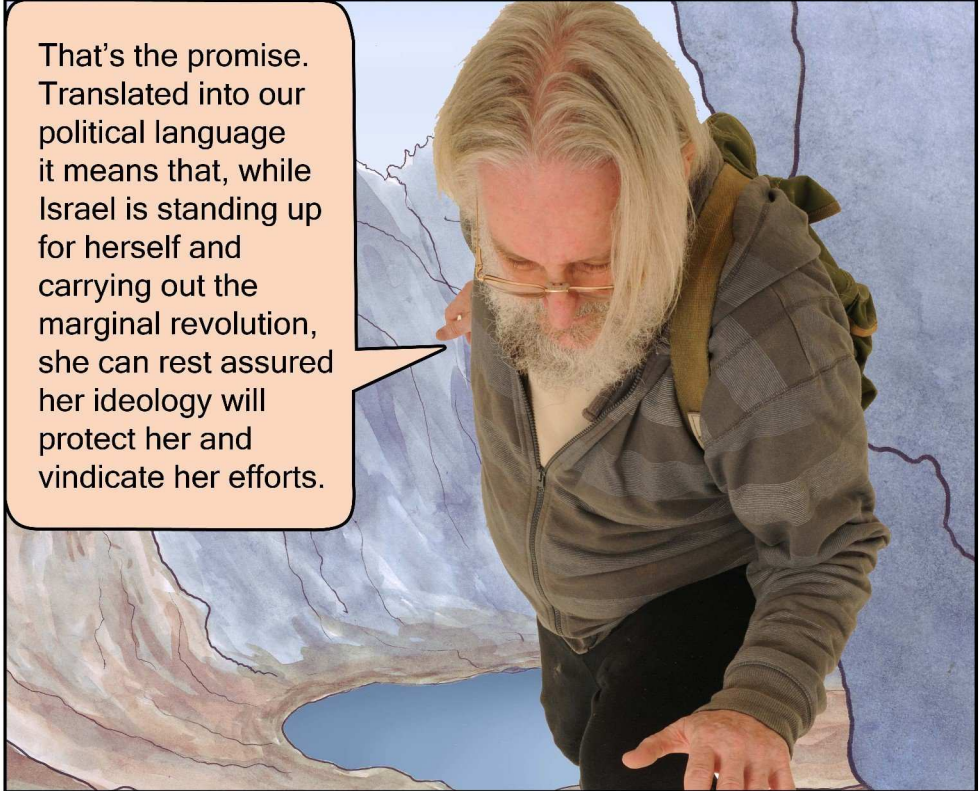
Yes but first there's a little interlude where the Hebrew writer expresses Yahweh's promise as a covenant agreement. Perhaps you should tell us about it.

Well, it begins with Yahweh speaking to Abraham in a dream...

Gen 15



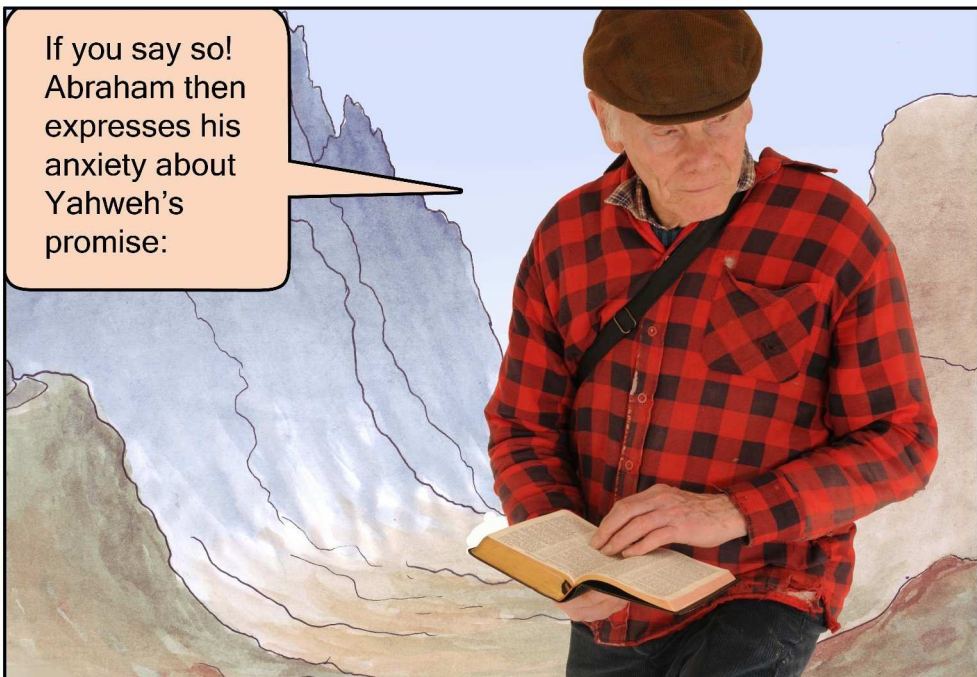
Don't be afraid, Abram.  
I am your shield, your  
very great reward.



That's the promise.  
Translated into our  
political language  
it means that, while  
Israel is standing up  
for herself and  
carrying out the  
marginal revolution,  
she can rest assured  
her ideology will  
protect her and  
vindicate her efforts.



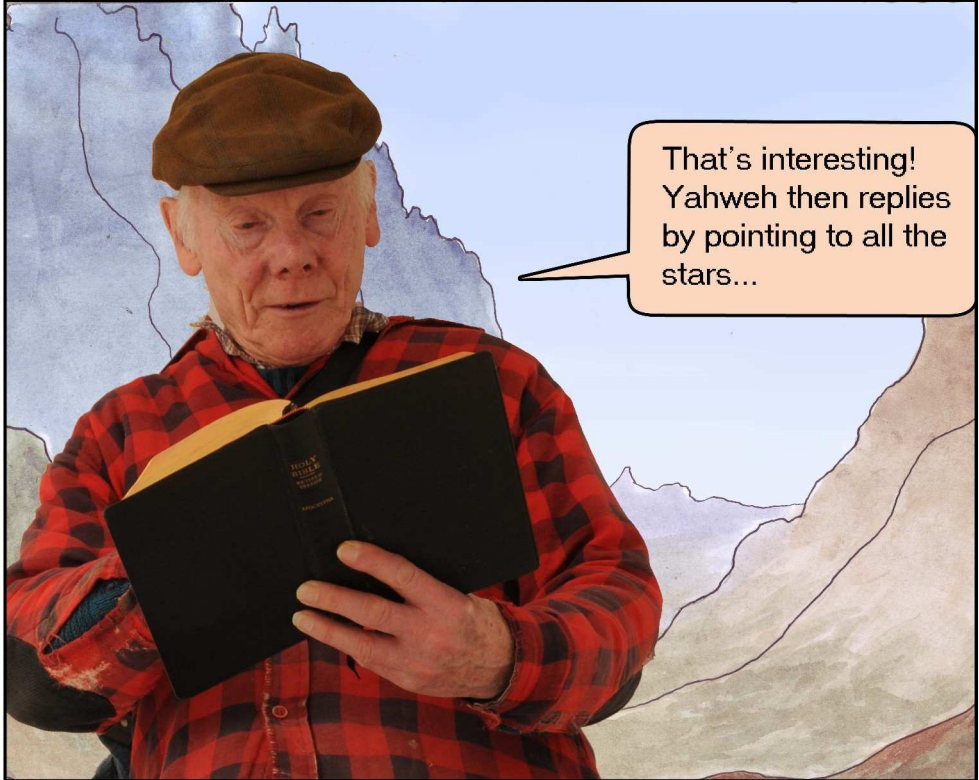
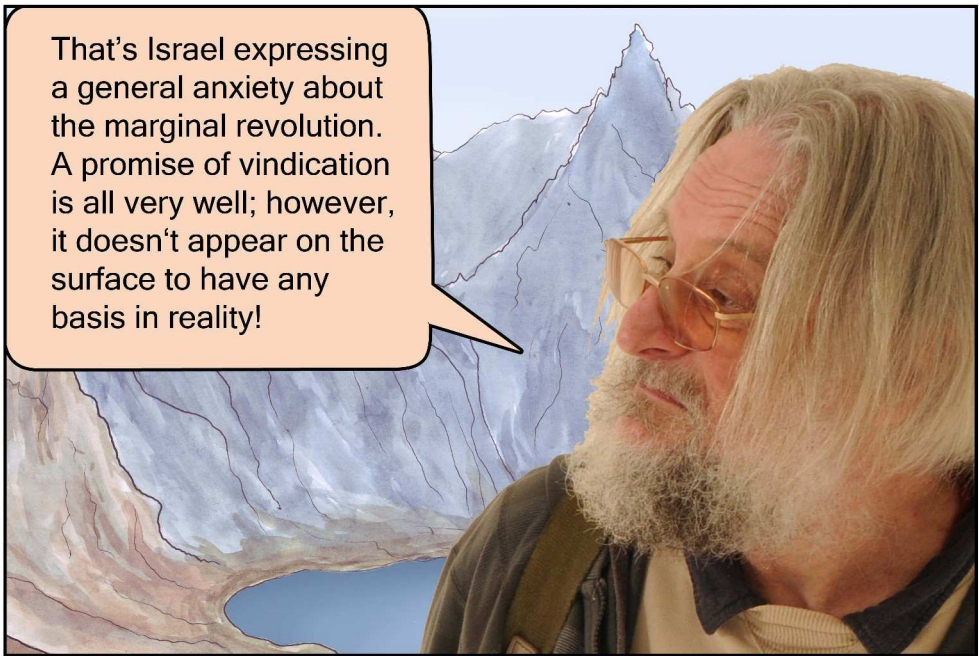
If you say so!  
Abraham then  
expresses his  
anxiety about  
Yahweh's  
promise:

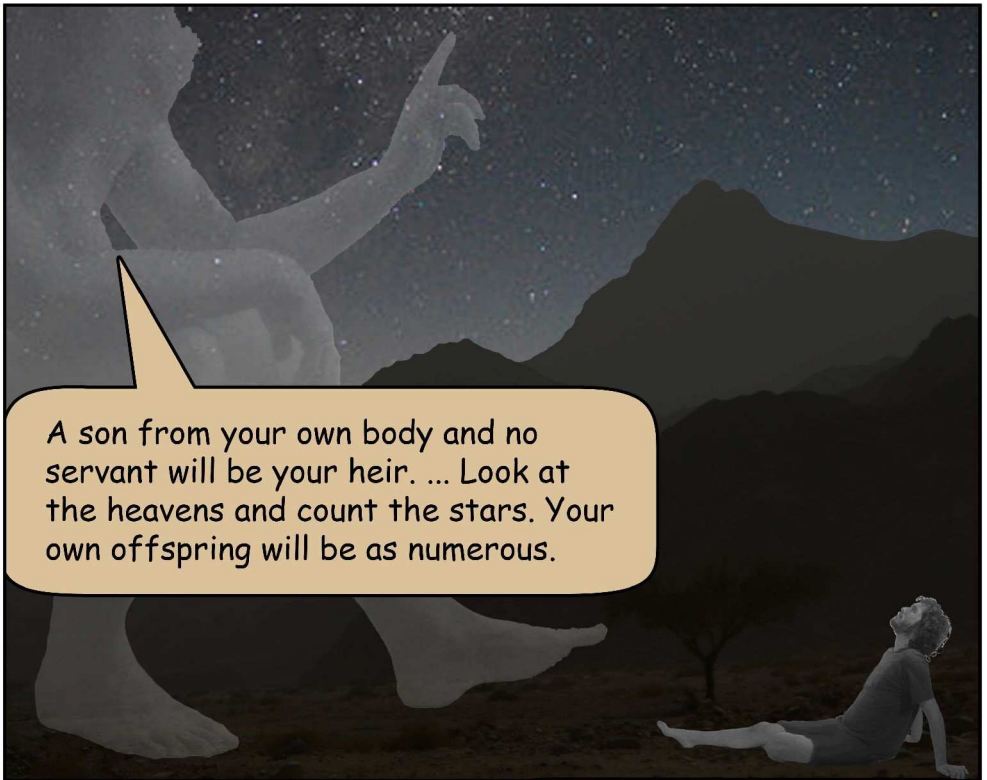


Yahweh, what can you give me  
since I remain childless? You  
have given me no children; so  
a servant in my household will  
be my heir.









A son from your own body and no servant will be your heir. ... Look at the heavens and count the stars. Your own offspring will be as numerous.

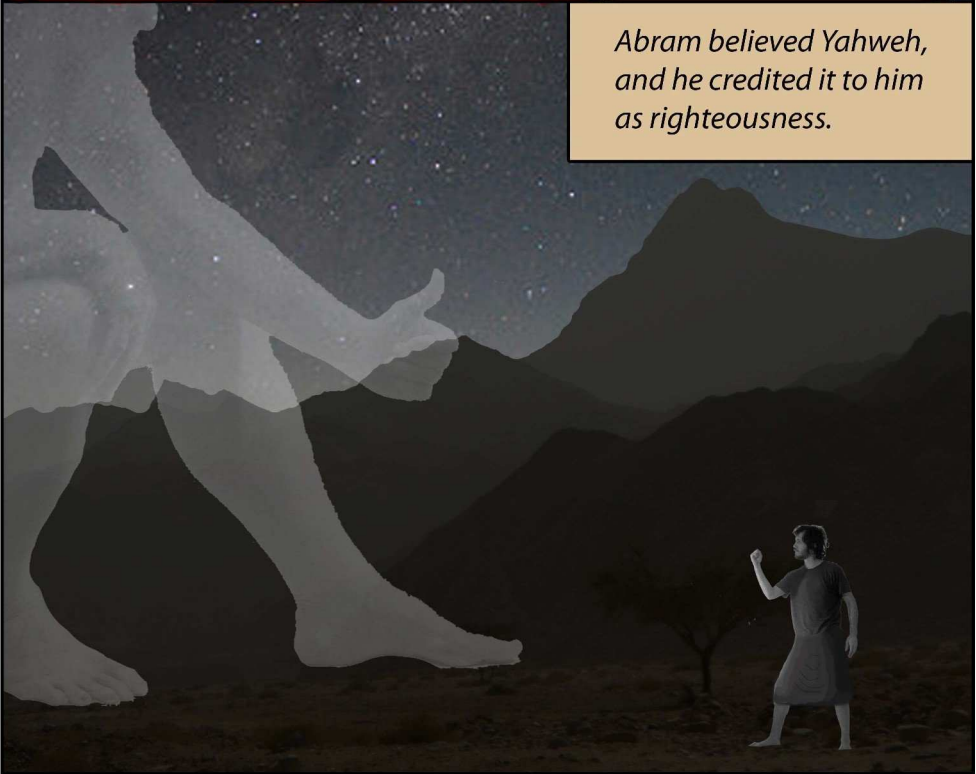


That's an assurance that the shaming process involves no make-believe. Clear-cut, unambiguous vindication will accompany Israel's revolutionary efforts, or so the writer says.



Sounds convincing!  
At this point Abraham  
makes his commitment:


*Abram believed Yahweh,  
and he credited it to him  
as righteousness.*





A man with a long white beard and glasses, looking down. He is wearing a grey jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background is a stylized, textured blue and purple landscape with jagged, mountain-like shapes.

That's Israel agreeing to risk revolution by trying to shame the world into changing its ways: demonstrating how to live so that others don't lose out.

A man wearing a brown flat cap and a red and black checkered shirt, looking down. The background is a textured blue and purple landscape with jagged, mountain-like shapes.

Yes, **that** I can see. The story now continues with...



... the same scenario being repeated, only in different terms. Here the promise is of a homeland rather than protection.



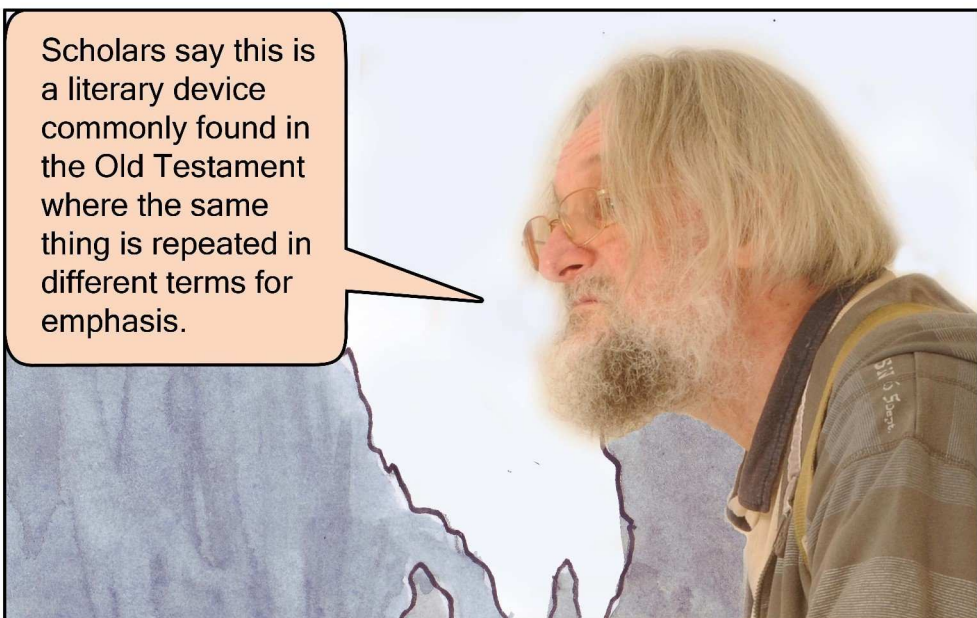
To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.

When Abraham again expresses doubts it's Yahweh, this time, who makes the commitment. He gets Abraham to set up a covenant ceremony using twin altars... but then performs it all by himself.



*When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day YAHWEH made a covenant with Abram.*

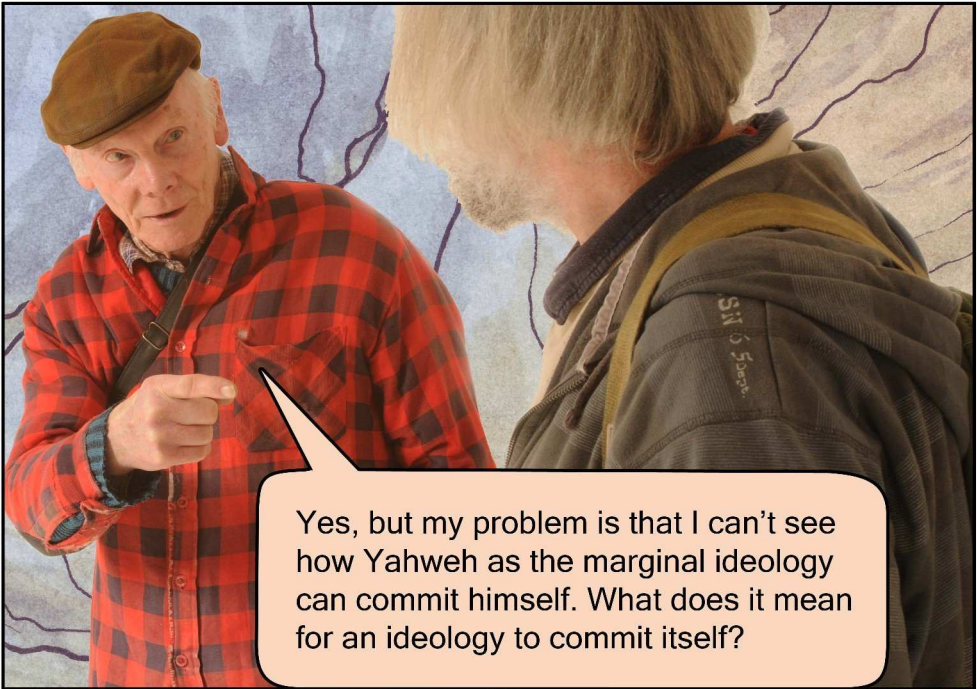
Scholars say this is a literary device commonly found in the Old Testament where the same thing is repeated in different terms for emphasis.



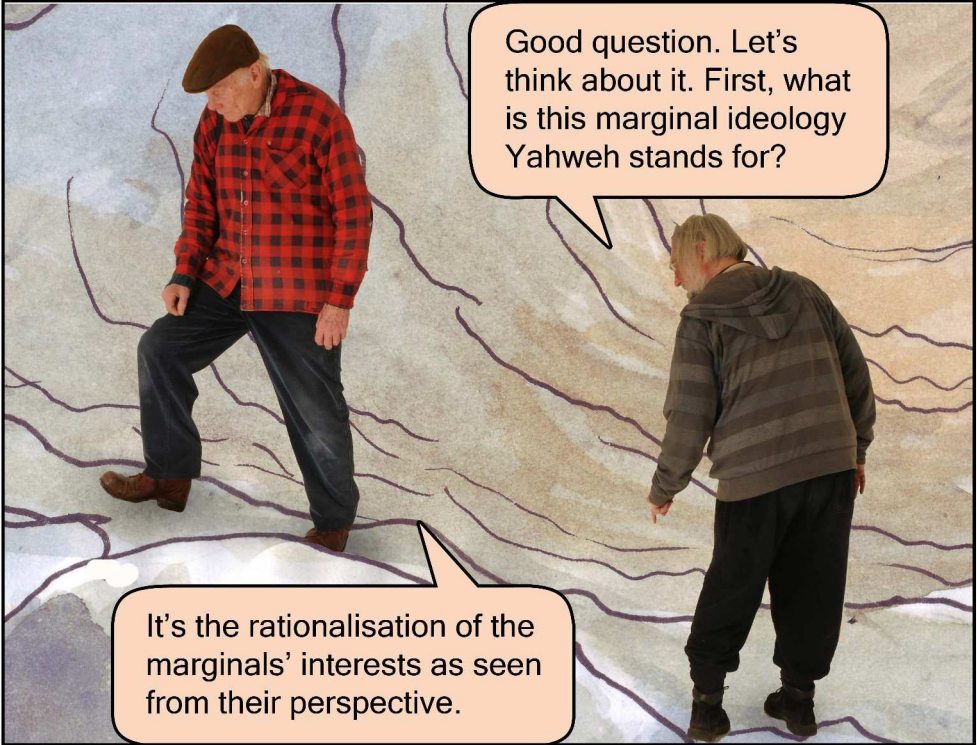
However, there's more than emphasis at stake here. A crucial point is being made in this skewed repetition where Yahweh, not Abraham, makes the commitment the second time round.







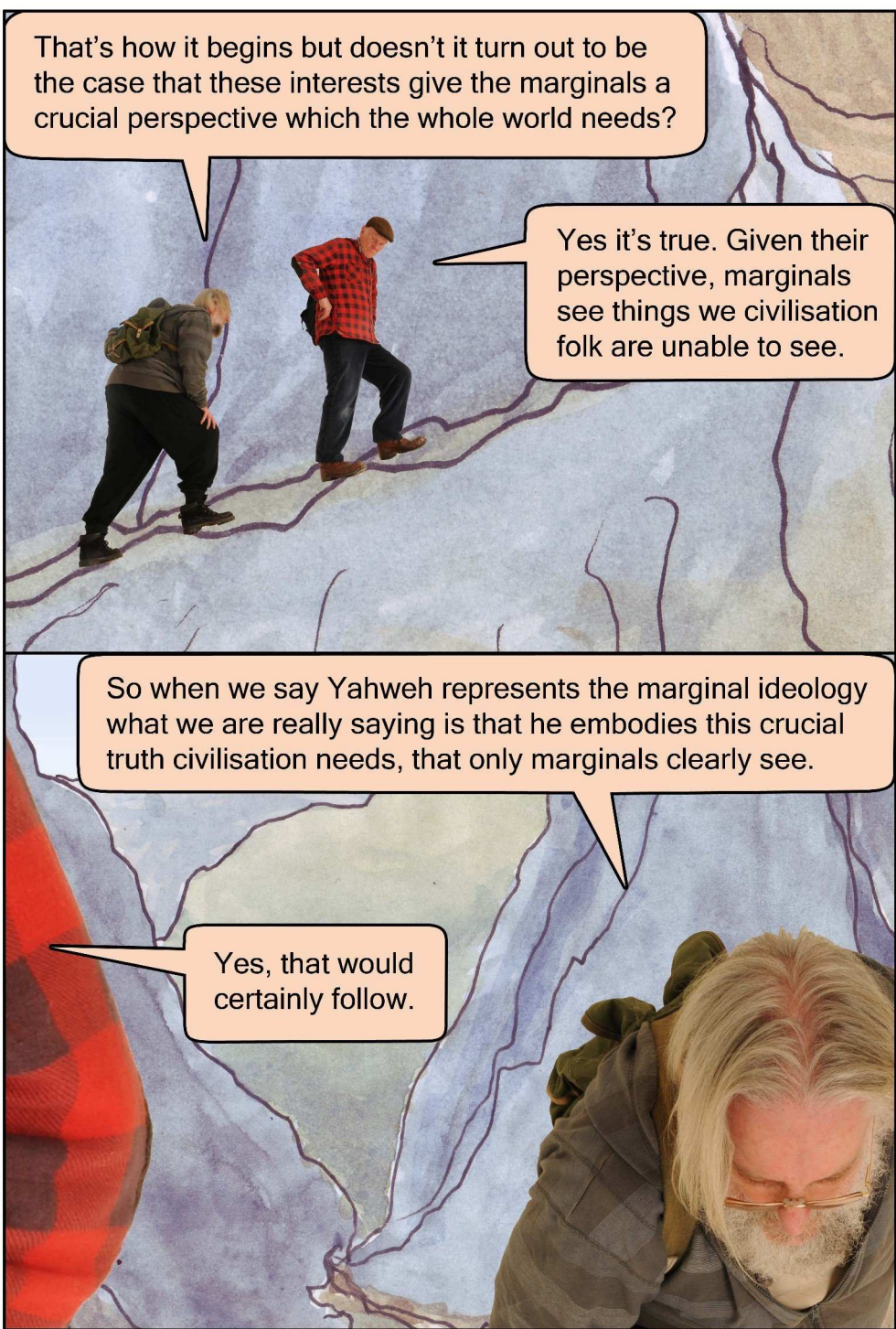
Yes, but my problem is that I can't see how Yahweh as the marginal ideology can commit himself. What does it mean for an ideology to commit itself?



Good question. Let's think about it. First, what is this marginal ideology Yahweh stands for?

It's the rationalisation of the marginals' interests as seen from their perspective.






That's how it begins but doesn't it turn out to be the case that these interests give the marginals a crucial perspective which the whole world needs?


Yes it's true. Given their perspective, marginals see things we civilisation folk are unable to see.

So when we say Yahweh represents the marginal ideology what we are really saying is that he embodies this crucial truth civilisation needs, that only marginals clearly see.

Yes, that would certainly follow.



However, my point remains:  
in what way can this crucial  
truth be said to commit itself?



After all a marginal shaming  
exercise may not even work,  
as seems to have been the  
case in Egypt? Where was  
God's commitment there?

Fair enough...

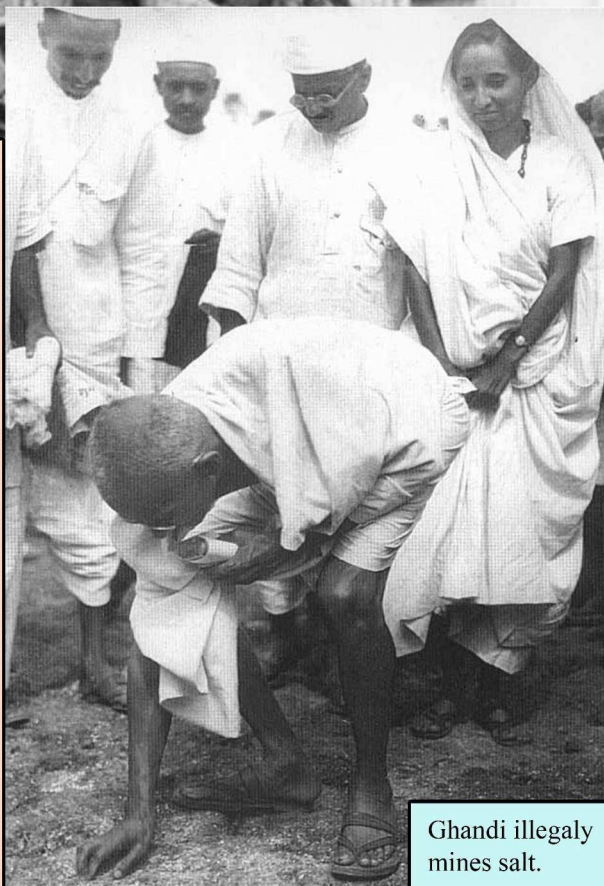


... but isn't it true that when any shaming exercise does in fact work, as for example when Ghandi shamed the British empire...



Ghandi takes tea with Mountbatten.

... that afterwards it seems somehow inevitable that it did work.



Ghandi illegally mines salt.



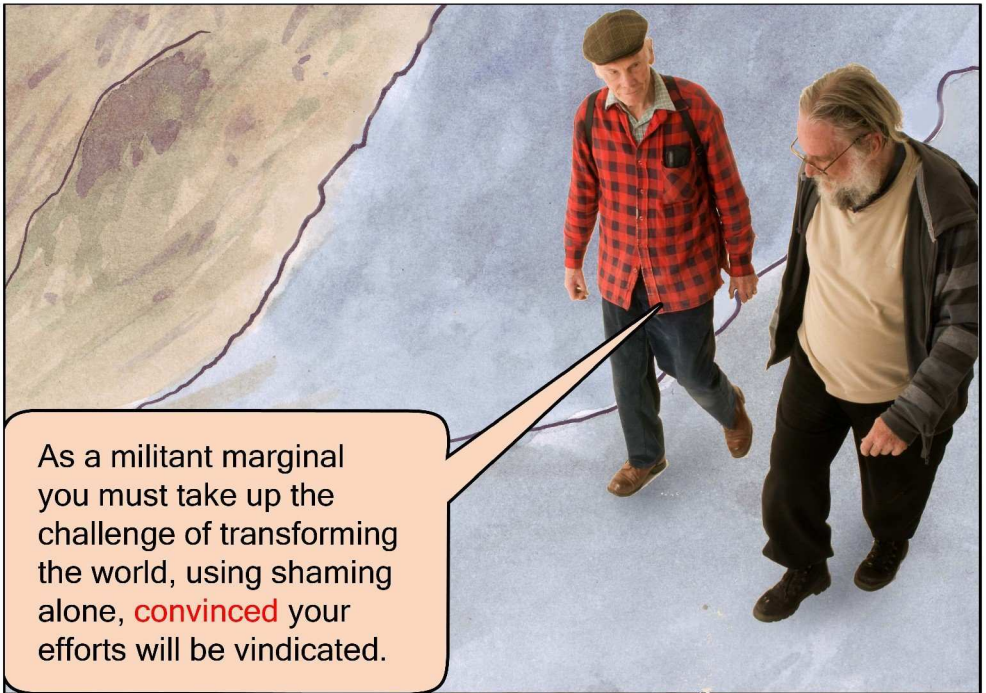
Because, once revealed, the truth becomes somehow irresistible even though the process of change is very painful and often takes a considerable time?



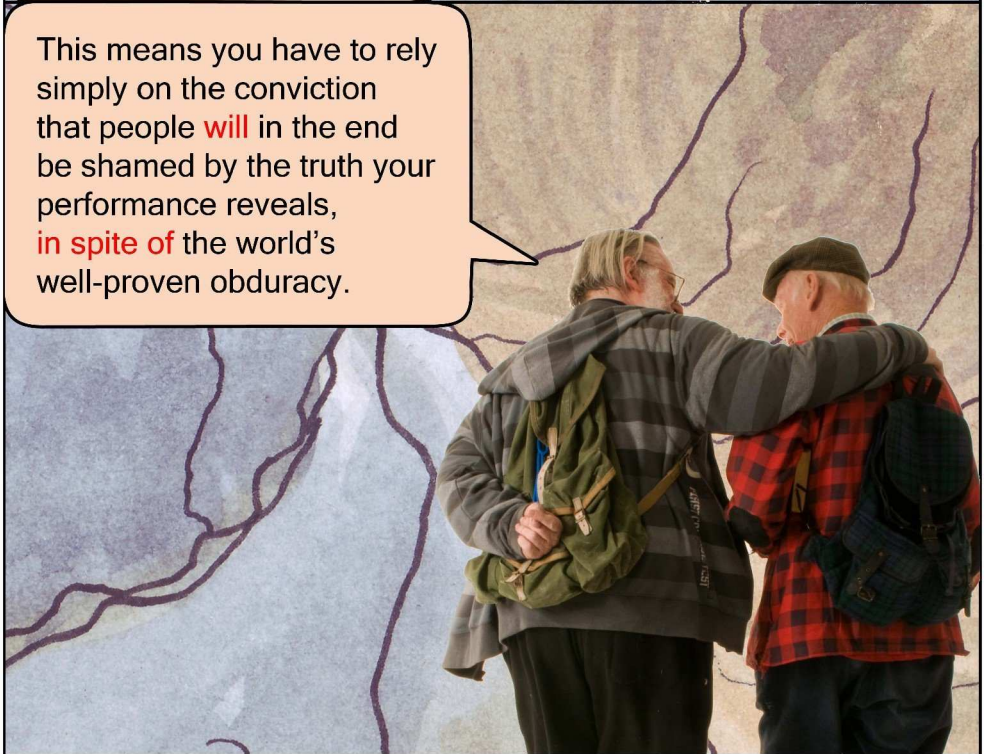
Ghandi  
after his  
assasination.

This is what  
Yahweh's  
commitment  
is all about, so  
it seems to me.





As a militant marginal you must take up the challenge of transforming the world, using shaming alone, **convinced** your efforts will be vindicated.



This means you have to rely simply on the conviction that people **will** in the end be shamed by the truth your performance reveals, **in spite of** the world's well-proven obduracy.



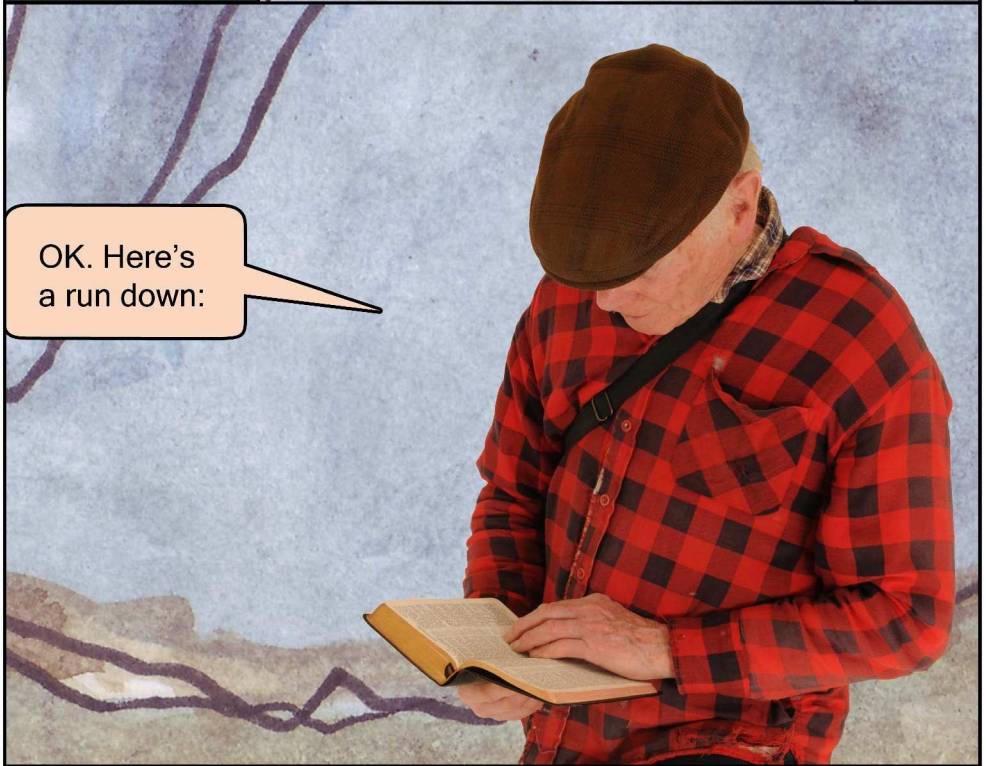




# 5

## Abraham and Ishmael







Sarah has difficulty in conceiving and, knowing how important it is for Abraham to have an heir, she tells him to take Hagar, her Egyptian slave-girl, and have a child by her.

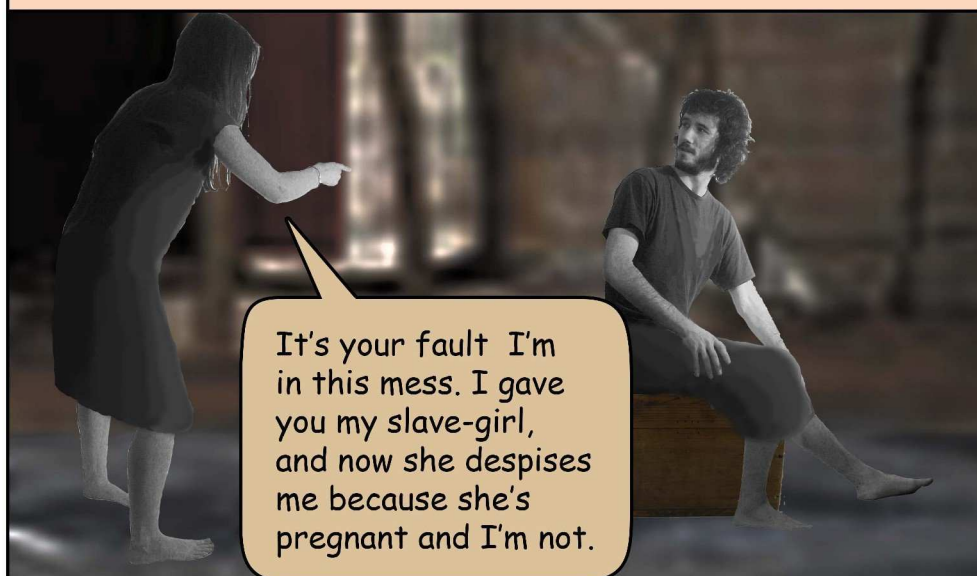
Gen 16. 1-2



Abraham, always one to take the path of least resistance, agrees and Hagar becomes pregnant. Sarah then becomes terribly jealous, suspecting Hagar of looking down on her.



As usual she takes out her frustration on Abraham.



Abraham counters in his usual weak manner.



Gen 16. 5-6

So Sarah is at liberty to deal with Hagar harshly...



The result is that Hagar runs away, so becoming a marginal.



Gen 16. 6



Naturally Yahweh, the god of the marginals, finds her. He tells her to go back and submit to her mistress for he has plans.



He promises to make her son the father of a great nation.



You shall name him Ishmael... He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him.

Gen 16. 9-12

So Abraham's first son Ishmael is born; however, when he is just thirteen Sarah herself becomes pregnant, as Yahweh had promised, and Ishmael gains a half-brother, Isaac.



Gen 21. 1-3

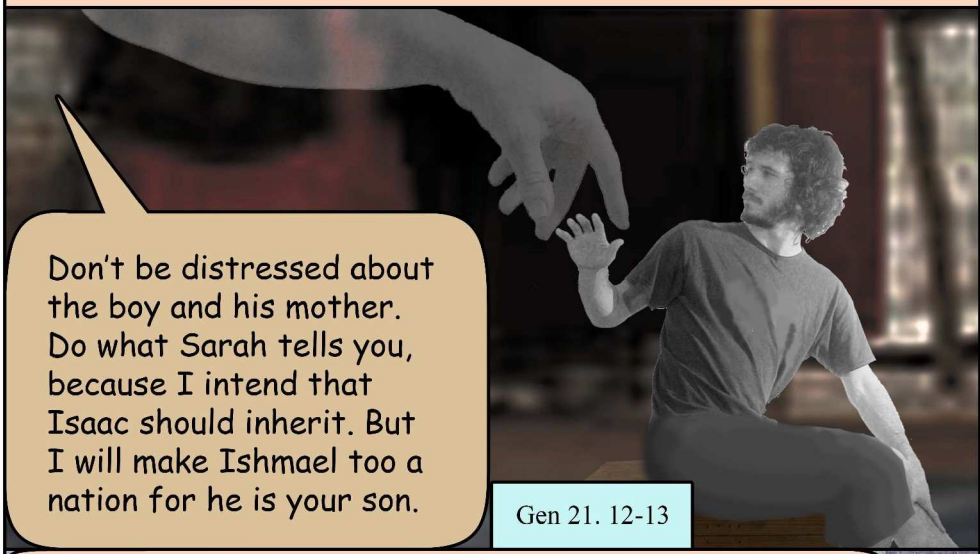
When Isaac is weaned Abraham holds a feast but Sarah is furious when she sees Ishmael playing with her son and, as usual, she goes and complains to Abraham.



Gen 21. 10

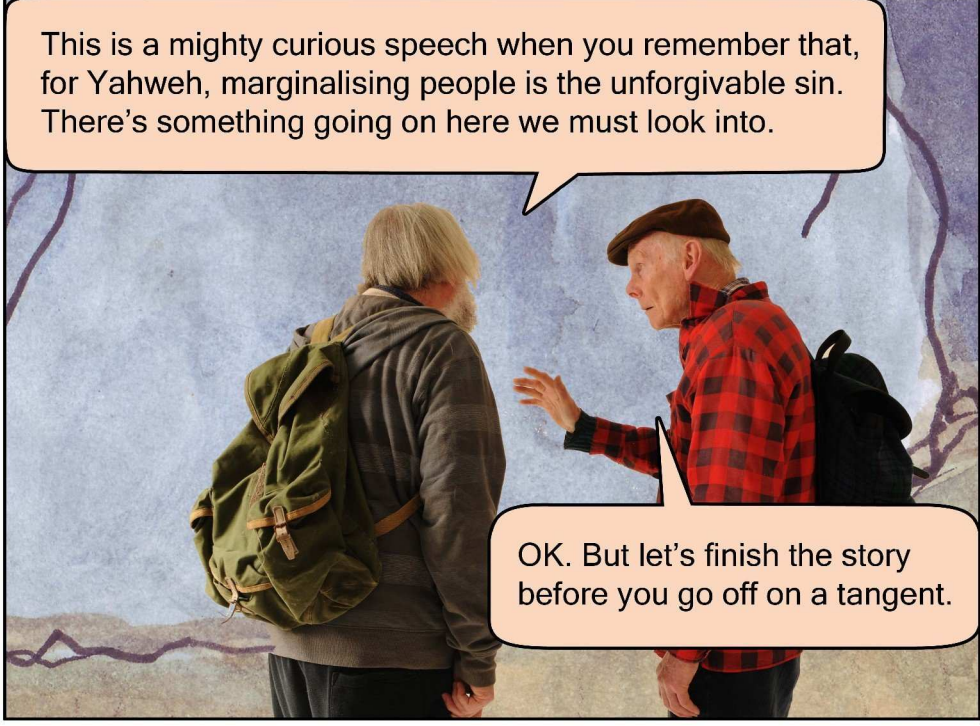


However, this time Abraham is not prepared to give in to his hectoring wife so easily, since his own son is involved. But, surprisingly, Yahweh tells him not to worry!



Don't be distressed about the boy and his mother. Do what Sarah tells you, because I intend that Isaac should inherit. But I will make Ishmael too a nation for he is your son.

Gen 21. 12-13



This is a mighty curious speech when you remember that, for Yahweh, marginalising people is the unforgivable sin. There's something going on here we must look into.

OK. But let's finish the story before you go off on a tangent.



Early the next morning Abraham takes some food and a skin of water and gives them to Hagar. He sets them on her shoulders and sends her off with the boy.



Hagar wanders with Ishmael in the desert of Beersheba.



Gen 21. 14-15

When the water in the skin is gone, she puts the boy under one of the bushes.



Then she goes off and sits down nearby, about a bowshot away, and begins to sob.



But of course Yahweh, the god of the marginals, hears the boy crying, and calls out to Hagar:

What's the matter?  
Don't be afraid.  
Lift him up for I've  
got plans for him.



Gen 21. 17-18

Then he opens her eyes and she sees a well of water.  
So she goes and fills the skin and gives the boy a drink.





Yahweh is with the boy as he grows up and he becomes a hunter.



He lives in the Desert of Paran and his mother gets him a wife from the land of Egypt, her own country.

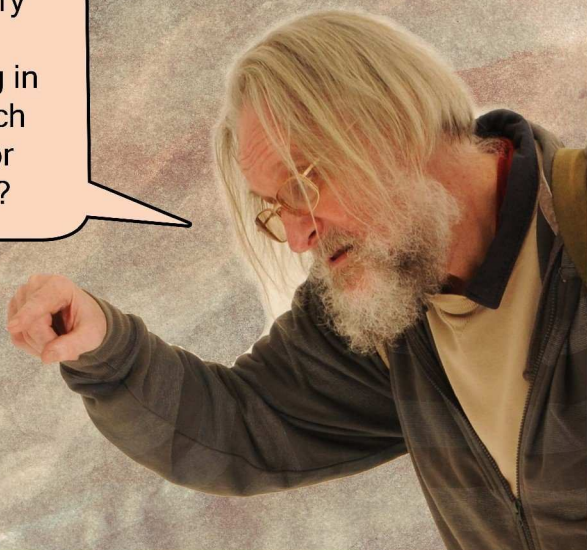
Gen 21. 20-21







Well, to be legitimate you have to be a revolutionary marginal and there's a suggestion of something in Ishmael's character which makes him unsuitable for this role, don't you think?

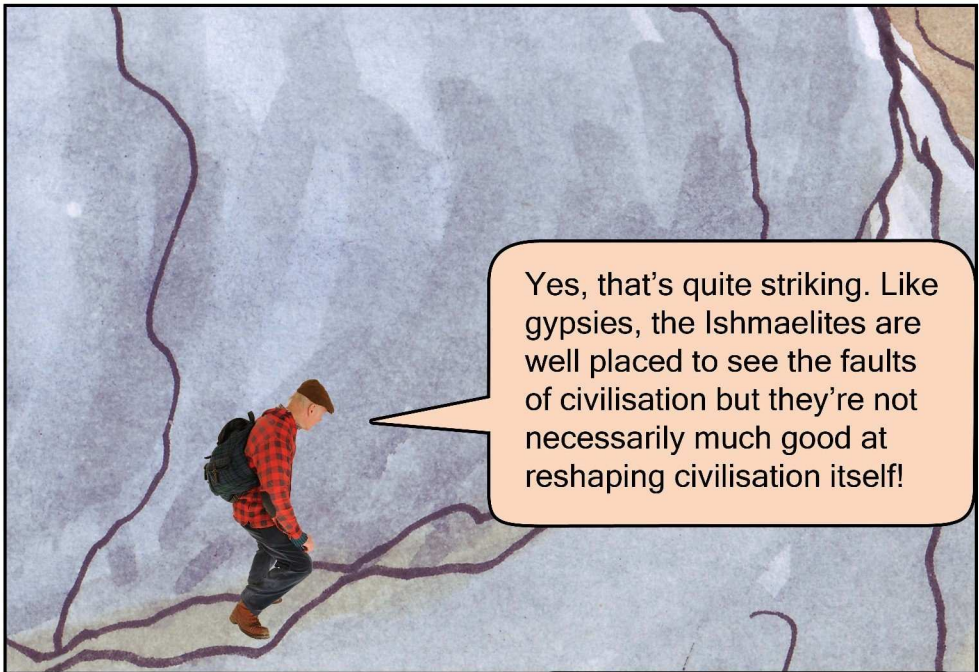


You're referring, I presume, to the fact that he's an outsider incapable of working together with others.

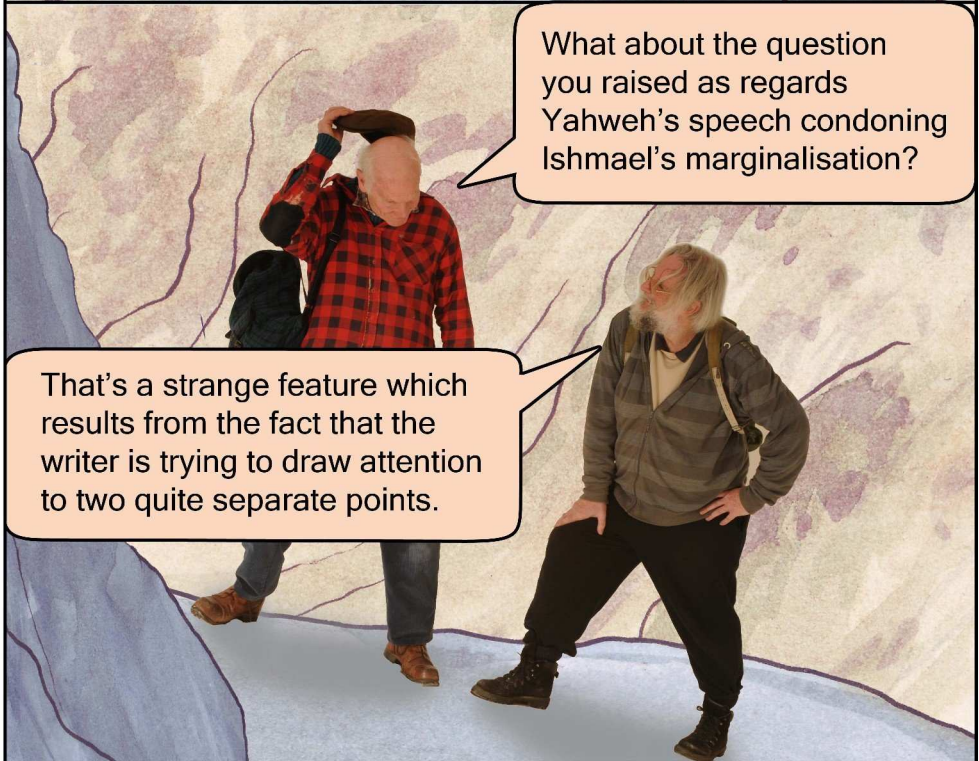


Exactly, as the text says his hand is against everyone and everyone's hand is against him.





Yes, that's quite striking. Like gypsies, the Ishmaelites are well placed to see the faults of civilisation but they're not necessarily much good at reshaping civilisation itself!



What about the question you raised as regards Yahweh's speech condoning Ishmael's marginalisation?

That's a strange feature which results from the fact that the writer is trying to draw attention to two quite separate points.

The first is Israel's bad conscience as regards the Ishmaelites who, in some senses, are more truly marginal than she is herself.



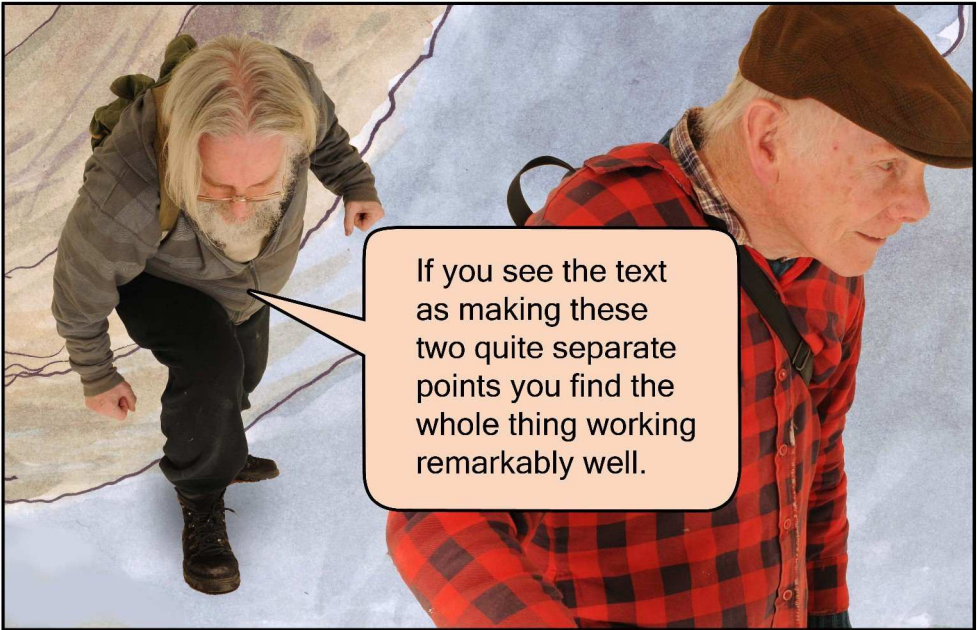
There go the Ishmaelites, first born sons of Abraham, thieves and gypsies every one of them!

The second is her realisation that, since the Ishmaelites are no revolutionaries, she is the one who has to take responsibility for carrying out the marginal revolution.

Now they're all gone  
I suppose it's up to  
us to carry the can!







However, if you try to read it as a story everything becomes completely unbelievable when Yahweh tells Abraham to go ahead and marginalise Ishmael and Hagar.



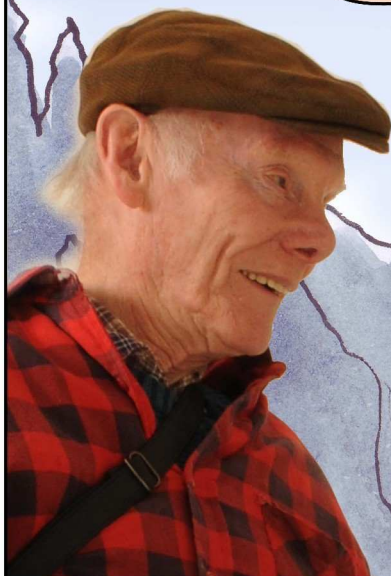


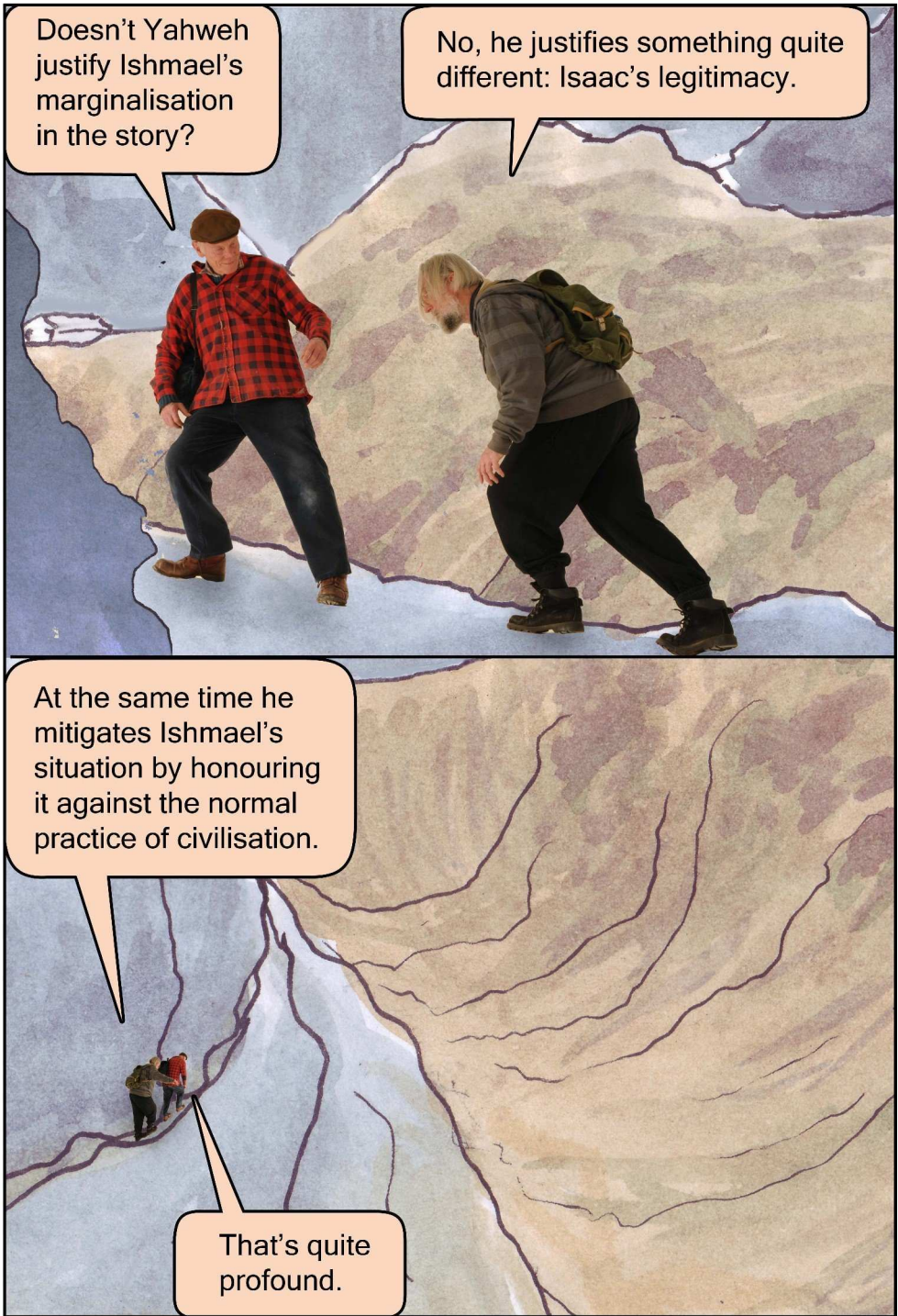
This is proof, if ever proof was needed, that what we are dealing with here are representations, not stories.

Which is why we are all in black and white



So we should leave others to make fools of themselves by trying to justify Yahweh's behaviour in this story on moral grounds, don't you think?





# 6

## Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac







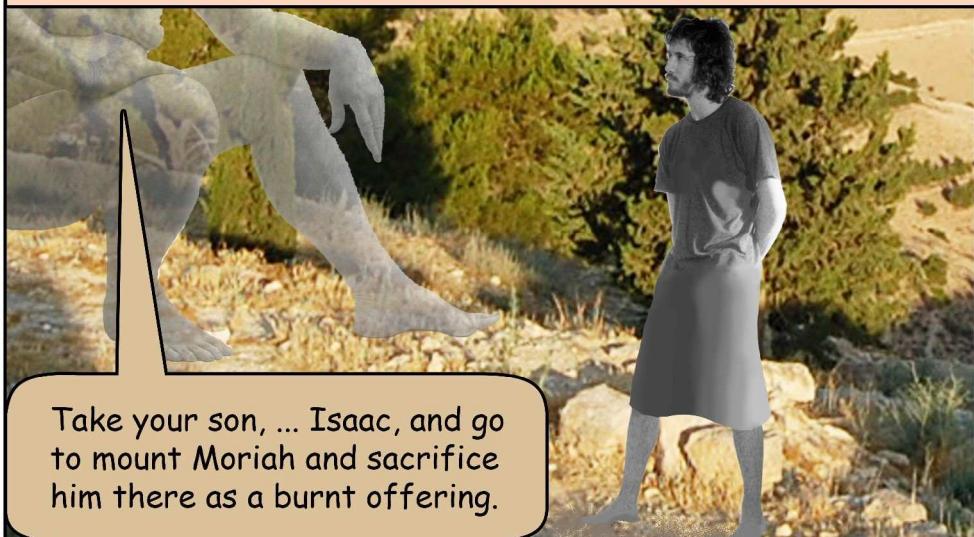
Should I now tell you the story of Abraham and Lot?

Not quite yet for I want you first to recount the sacrifice of Isaac, undoubtedly the greatest of the promise stories.



Gen 22. 1-19

OK. One day, out of the blue, Yahweh surprised Abraham with a strange command:



Take your son, ... Isaac, and go to mount Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering.

Abraham did as he was told. He took some wood and placed it on Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.



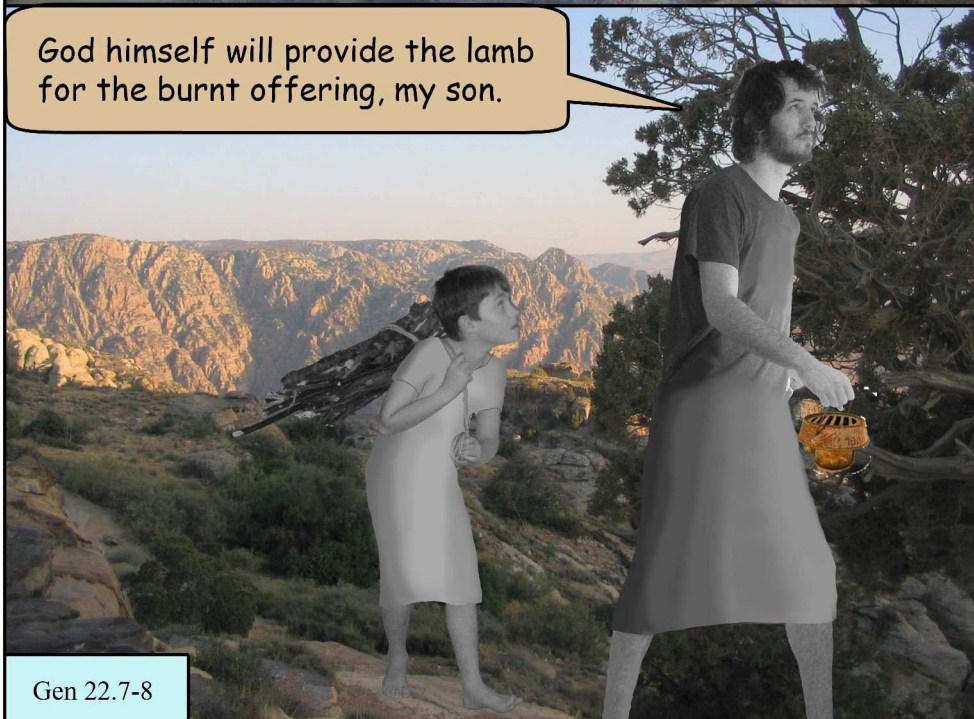
Gen 22.2-6



As the two of them went on their way, Isaac said to his father...



God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.



Gen 22.7-8

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.



Then he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.



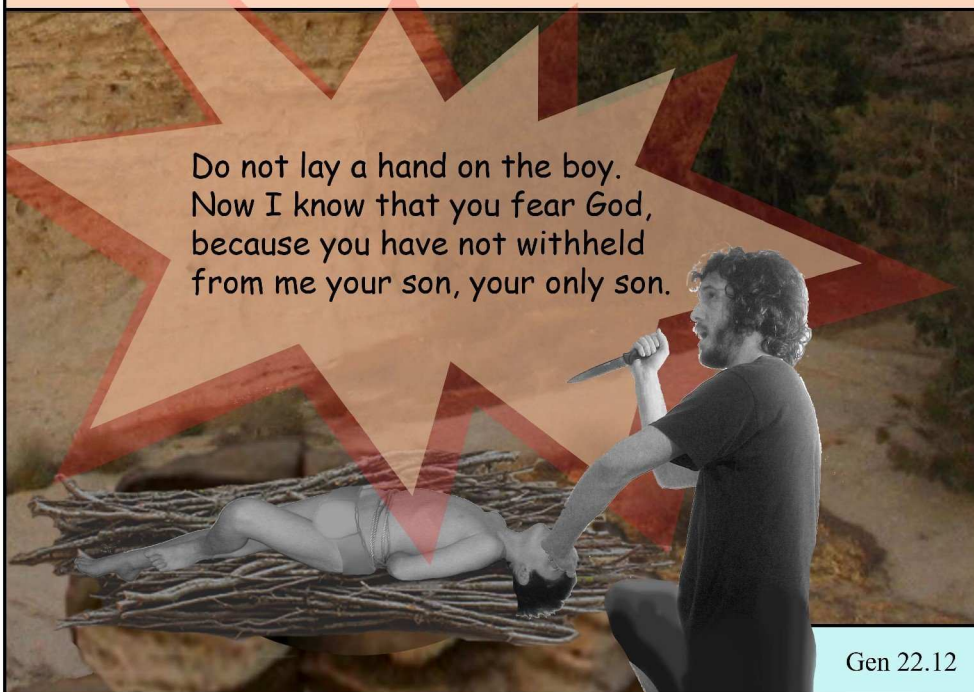


Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.



But Yahweh called out to him from heaven

Do not lay a hand on the boy.  
Now I know that you fear God,  
because you have not withheld  
from me your son, your only son.



Gen 22.12



Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.



He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering, instead of his son.

Gen 22.13

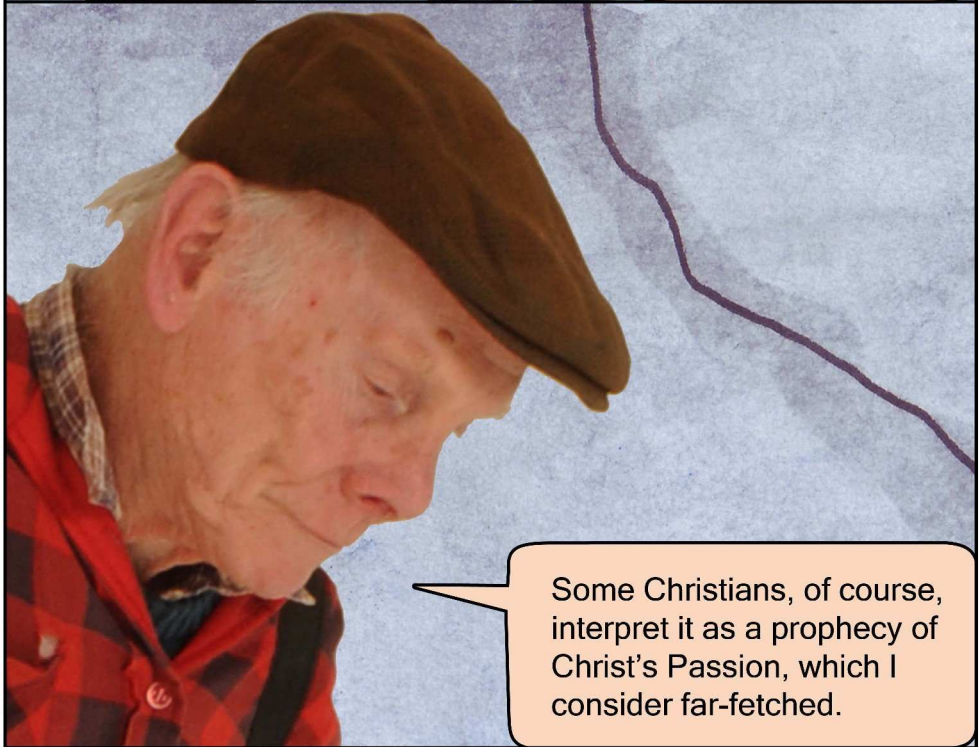
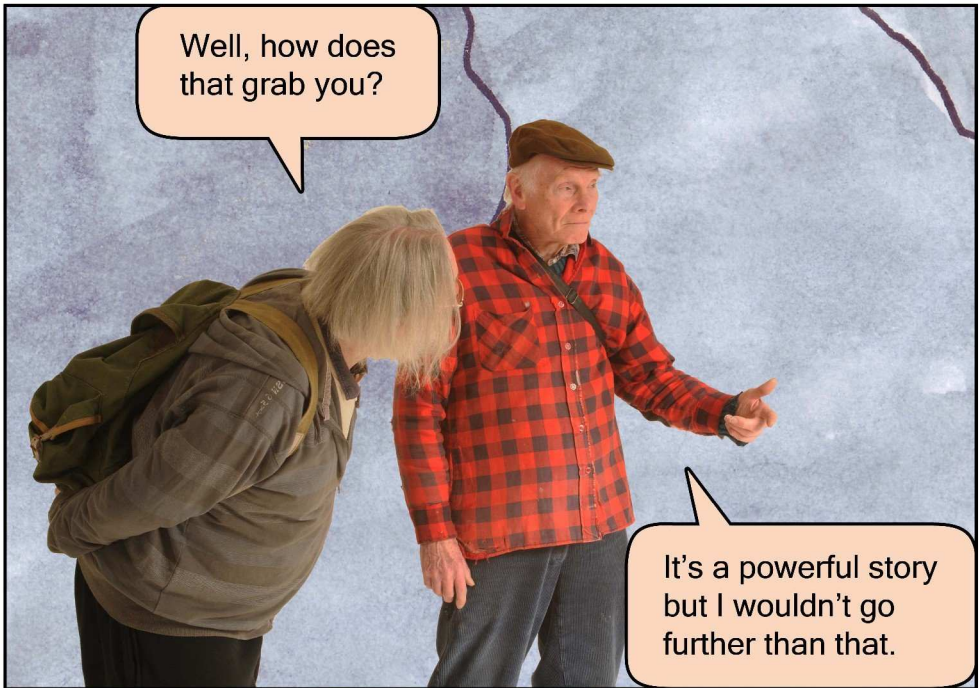


Then Yahweh called to Abraham from heaven,  
a second time, and said...

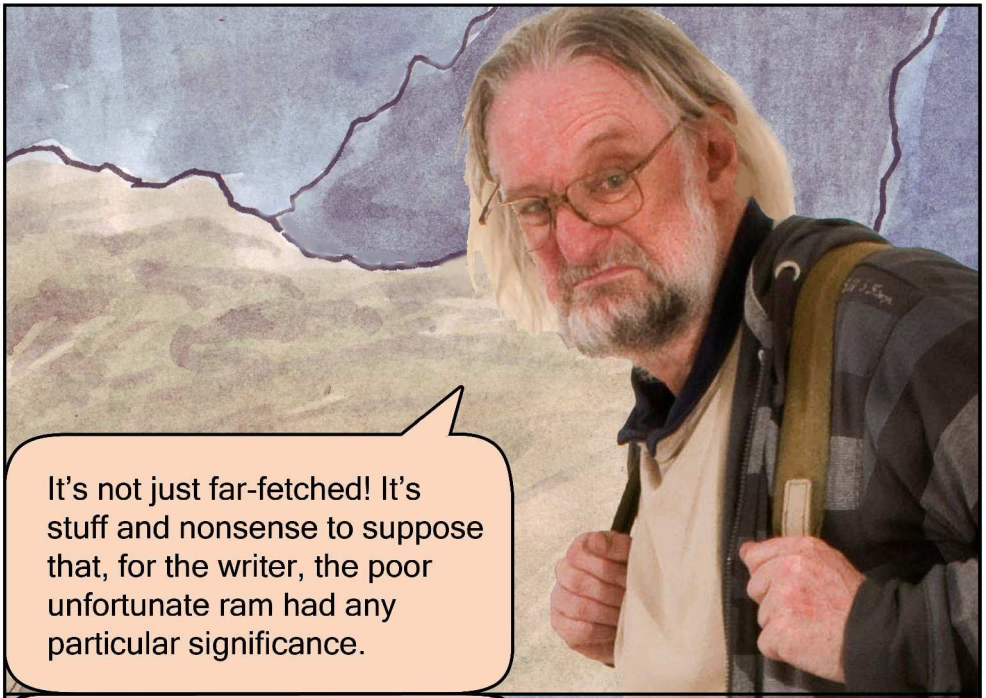
Because you have done this, I will surely bless you  
and make your descendants as numerous as the stars  
in the sky. They will take possession of the cities of  
their enemies, and through your offspring all nations  
on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.



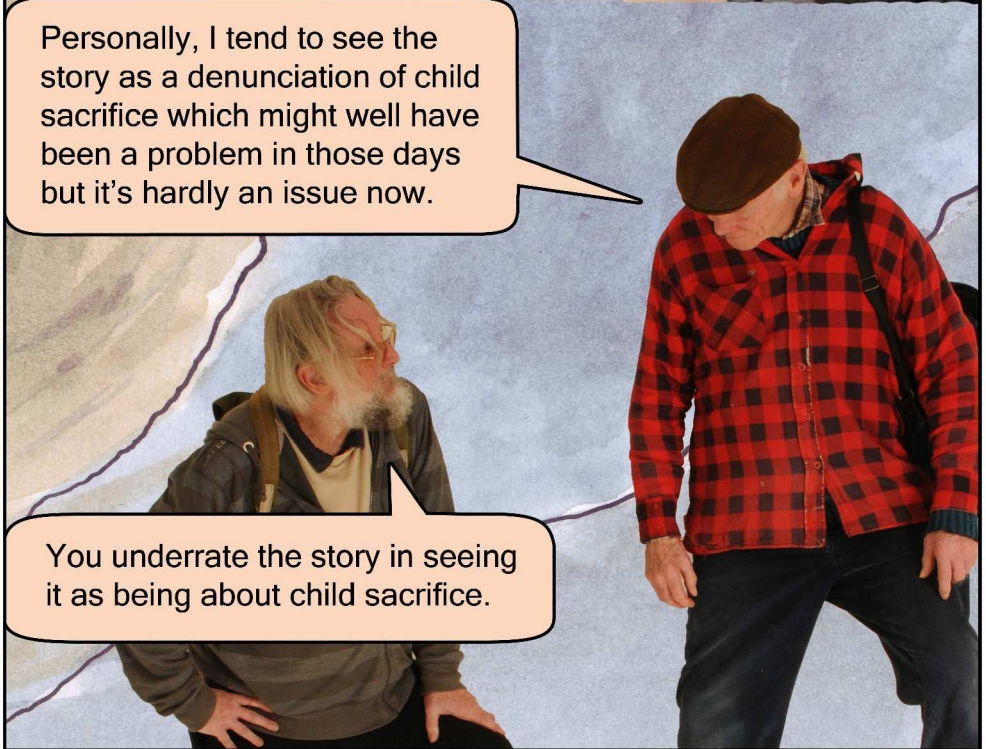
Gen 22.15-18





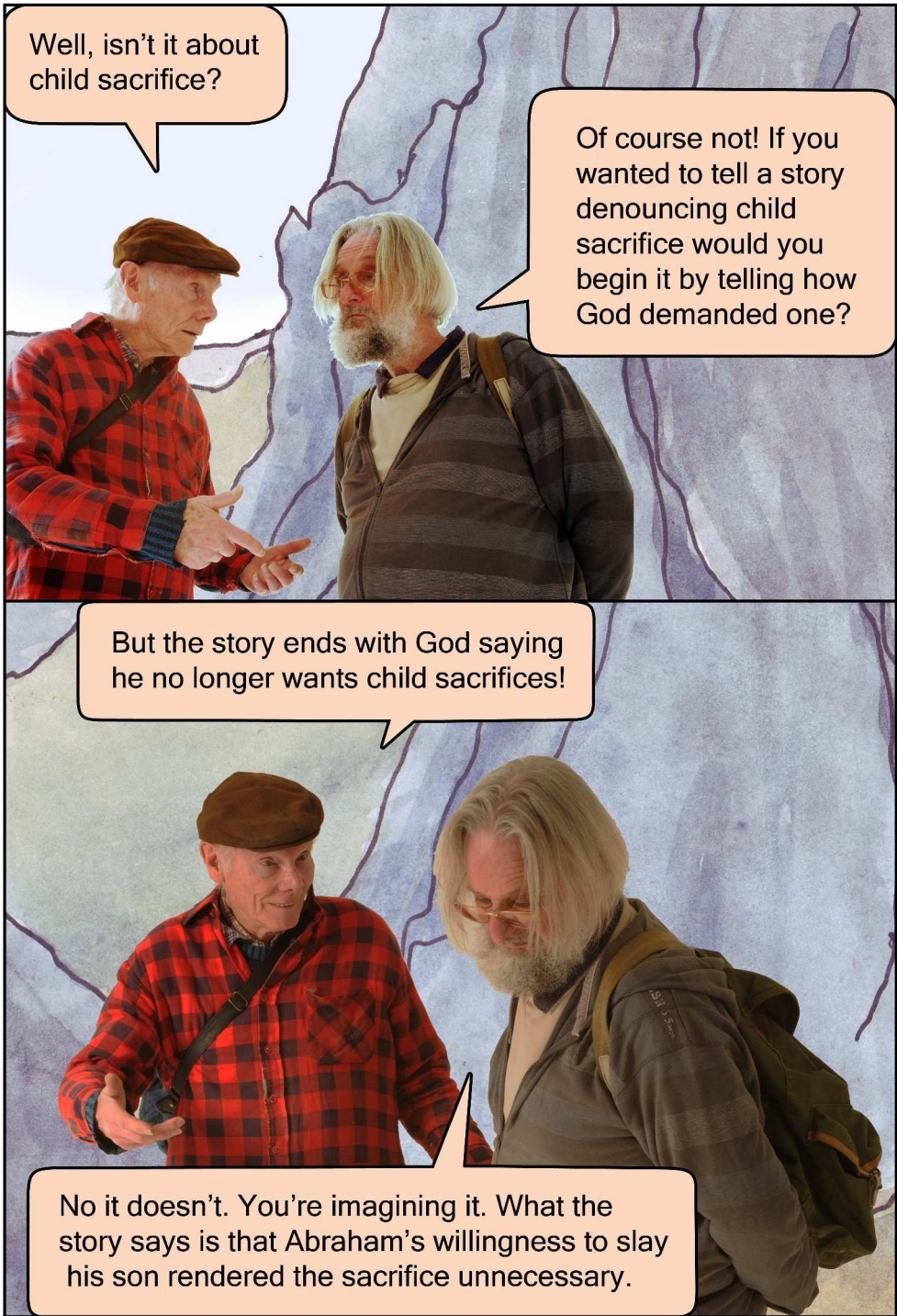


It's not just far-fetched! It's stuff and nonsense to suppose that, for the writer, the poor unfortunate ram had any particular significance.

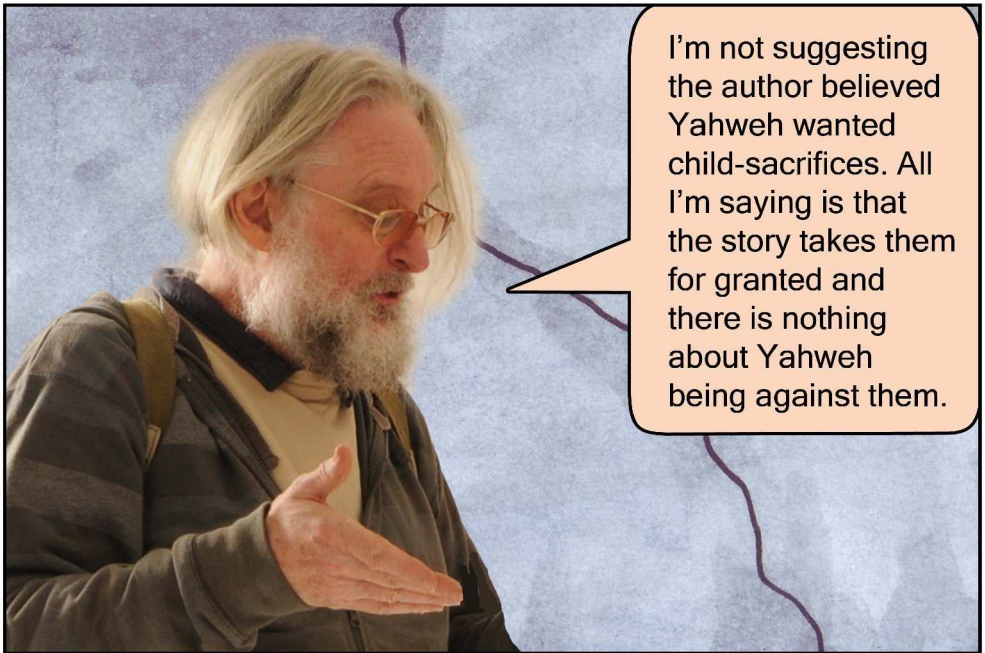


Personally, I tend to see the story as a denunciation of child sacrifice which might well have been a problem in those days but it's hardly an issue now.

You underrate the story in seeing it as being about child sacrifice.







I'm not suggesting the author believed Yahweh wanted child-sacrifices. All I'm saying is that the story takes them for granted and there is nothing about Yahweh being against them.

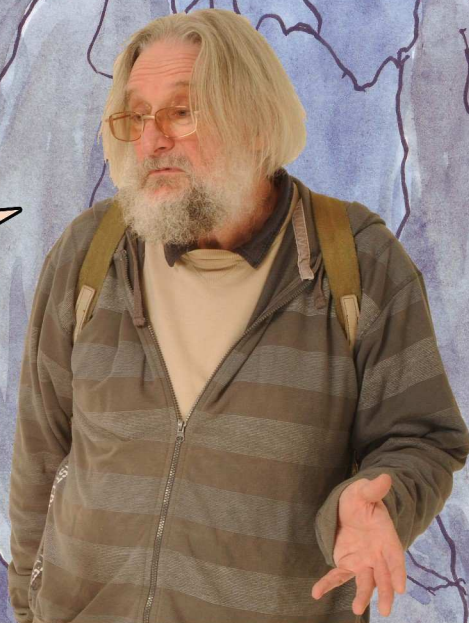


Don't you think that's strange if the author's purpose was to denounce child sacrifice?

Yes I suppose it is.



There's another thing. We've said these stories function as representations. If this story, too, is a representation then it must be about what child sacrifice here **represents** and not about child sacrifice itself.



In fact, claiming this story is about child sacrifice is as silly as claiming the story of Adam and Eve is about sex and the fact that scholars are fools doesn't excuse you for being one too.



OK, stop ranting and tell me what the story is really all about!

Wouldn't you say the story presents us with a great, grand-daddy Israelite who is willing to obey an authoritarian God in spite of all the obvious drawbacks?

Fair enough!

However, we shouldn't be fooled by that, not simply because it's conservative, religious garbage which ruins the story, but also because it has the priestly editors' dirty fingerprints all over it!

OK. So tell me what the original story was about!







So, if the promise is to vindicate Israel's efforts, sacrificing the promise must indicate that Israel has to be prepared to go ahead without any assurance her efforts will pay off.

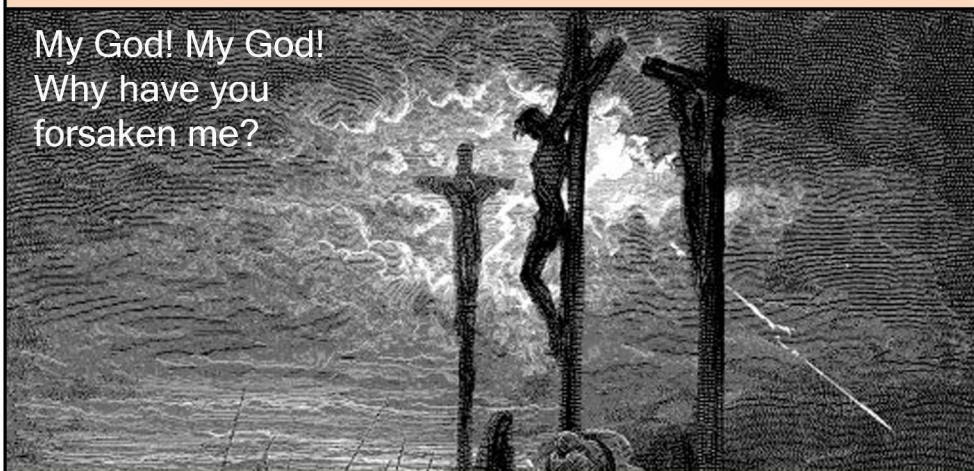


This means that true Israelites, as marginal revolutionaries, have to operate quite differently from religious martyrs whose beliefs, they believe, **guarantee** their vindication.



We see this excruciating scenario played out by Jesus on the cross and expressed in his cry of dereliction.

My God! My God!  
Why have you  
forsaken me?



So, just as Jesus fulfills this revolutionary Hebrew strategy, so this story, of the sacrifice of Isaac, sets out what Jesus later fulfilled, making it for me one of the greatest ever told.

What say you?

I'm still just getting  
my mind around it.



# 7

## Abraham and Lot





Perhaps we should move on now.

Gen 13. 1-13  
& Gen 19

The next story is about Abraham's nephew Lot, father of the Moabites and Ammonites. It's fragmented but I shall try to piece it together.

Lot had journeyed to Canaan with Abraham but their flocks and herds now became so numerous that quarrels broke out between their herdsmen. It therefore became necessary to split up.

Let's part company. You choose. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right.

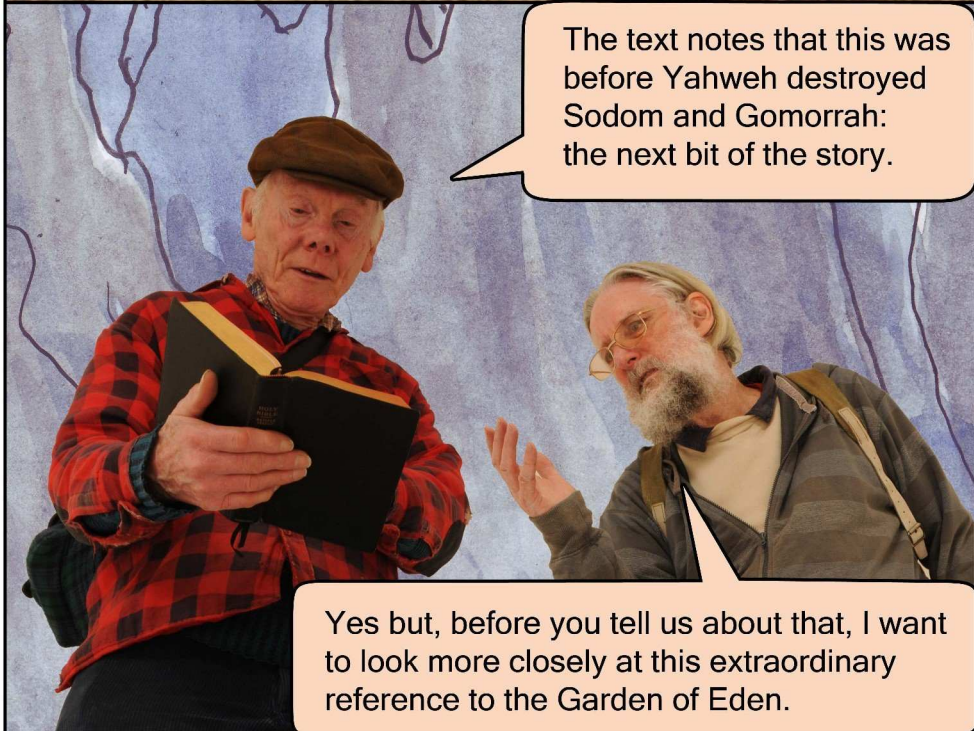


Gen 13. 9

Lot sees that the whole plain of the Jordan is well watered, like the garden of the Lord and like the land of Egypt. So he chooses to go that way and pitches his tents near Sodom.

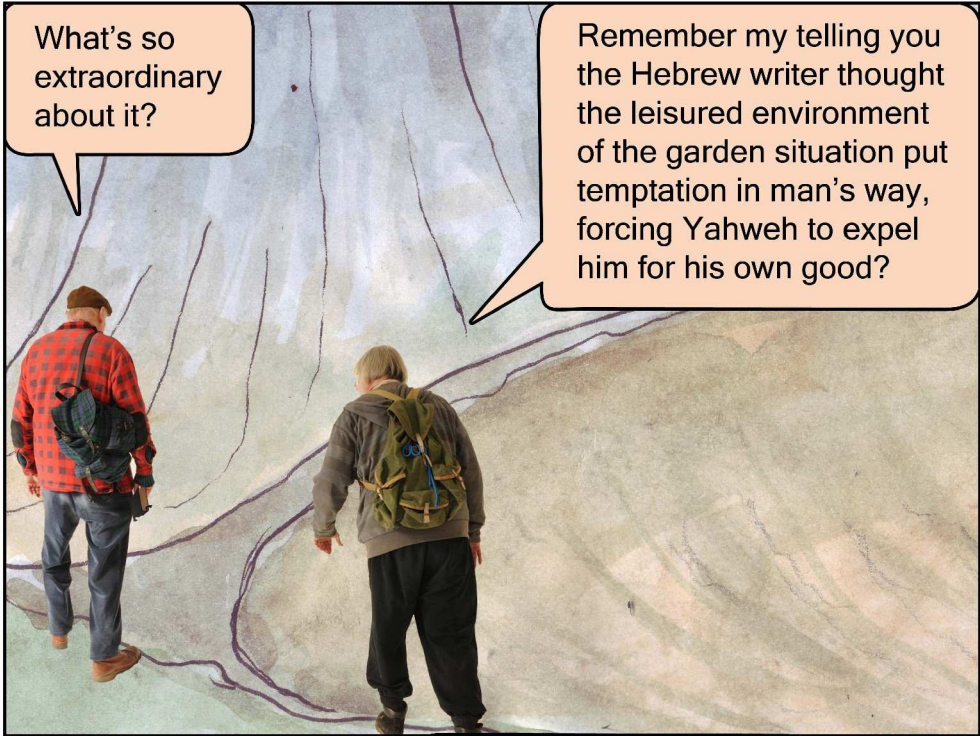


The text notes that this was before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah: the next bit of the story.



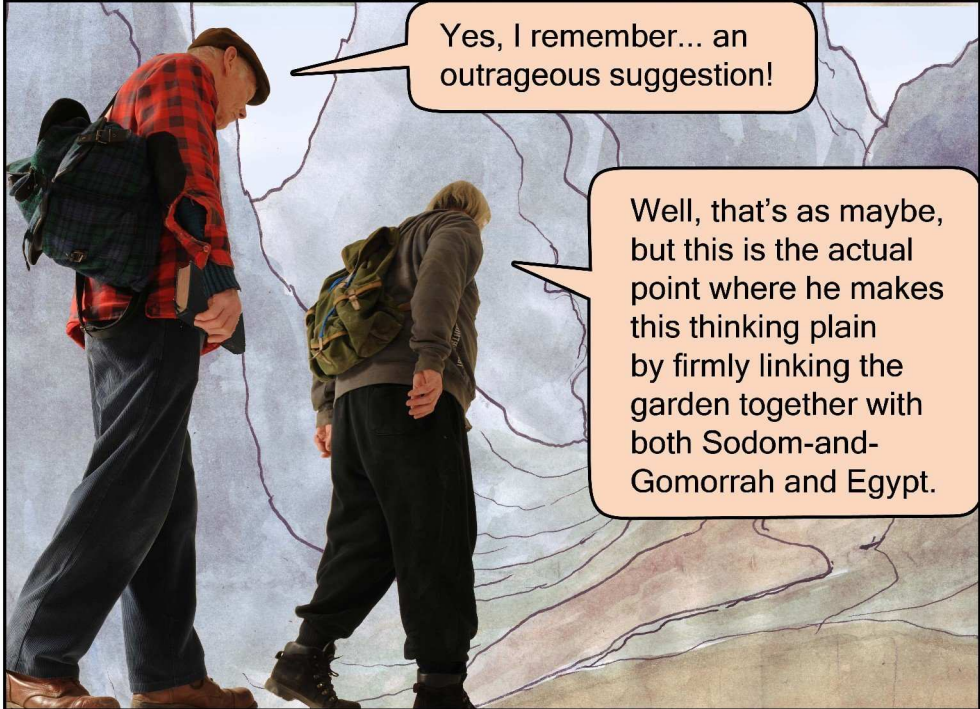
Yes but, before you tell us about that, I want to look more closely at this extraordinary reference to the Garden of Eden.





What's so extraordinary about it?

Remember my telling you the Hebrew writer thought the leisured environment of the garden situation put temptation in man's way, forcing Yahweh to expel him for his own good?



Yes, I remember... an outrageous suggestion!

Well, that's as maybe, but this is the actual point where he makes this thinking plain by firmly linking the garden together with both Sodom-and-Gomorrah and Egypt.



Indeed it makes me think he intends readers to see Lot as subconsciously wanting to return to the garden just as the rescued Hebrews were always clamouring to return to Egypt.





However, tell us the full story and let's see how it reads, remembering that sex is always used as a way of talking politics.

Very well.

On hearing bad reports of Sodom and Gomorrah, God sends two angels to see if any righteous people can be found there. They arrive in the evening at the city gate where Lot is sitting.



Gen 19



Immediately Lot invites them to stay the night but they demur.



No thanks we're OK.  
We'll spend the night  
in the square.

However, he urges them to stay and eventually they agree.

No, you must come  
with me to my house.



Gen 19. 2-3

Back in his house Lot prepares a meal, baking flat bread for his guests, and they have supper together.

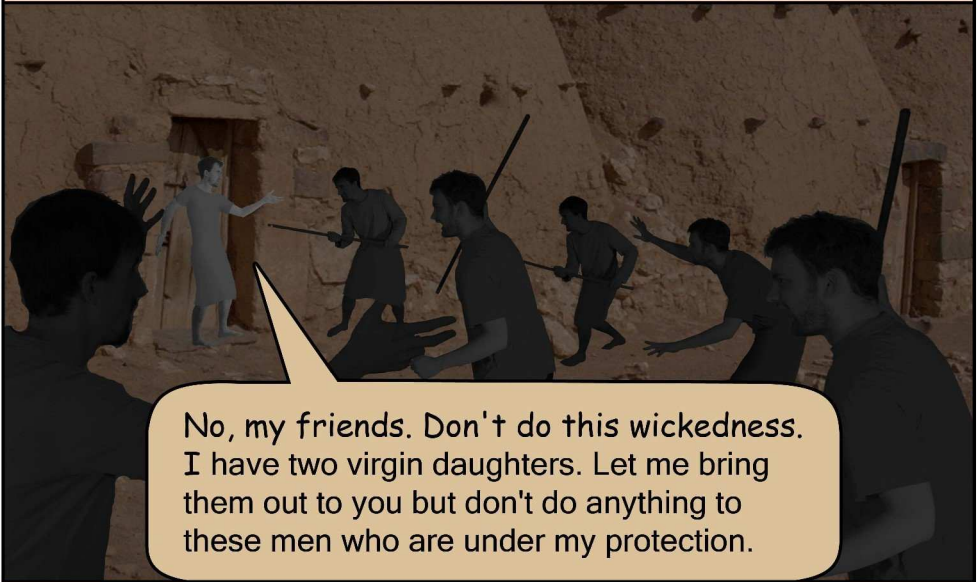


However, before they have time to go to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surround the house and start banging on the door.



Gen 19. 4-5

Lot goes out to remonstrate with them, carefully shutting the door behind him.



No, my friends. Don't do this wickedness. I have two virgin daughters. Let me bring them out to you but don't do anything to these men who are under my protection.

However, his efforts to appease them fail.



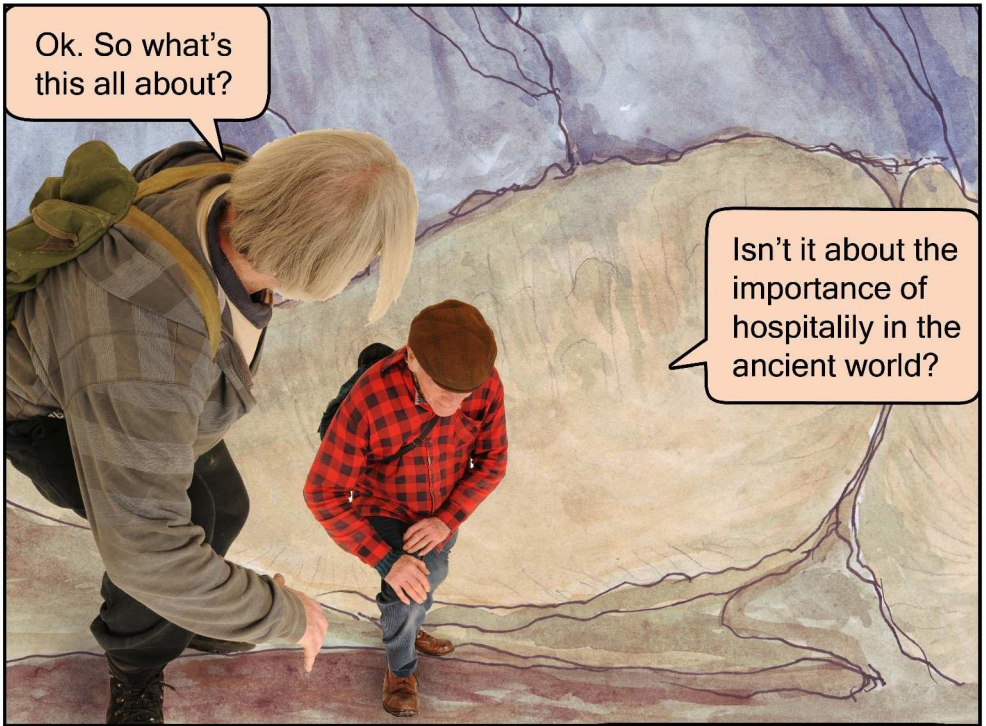
Get out of our way!

You come here as a foreigner and now you want to tell us what's right and wrong?

If you don't move we'll treat you worse than them.

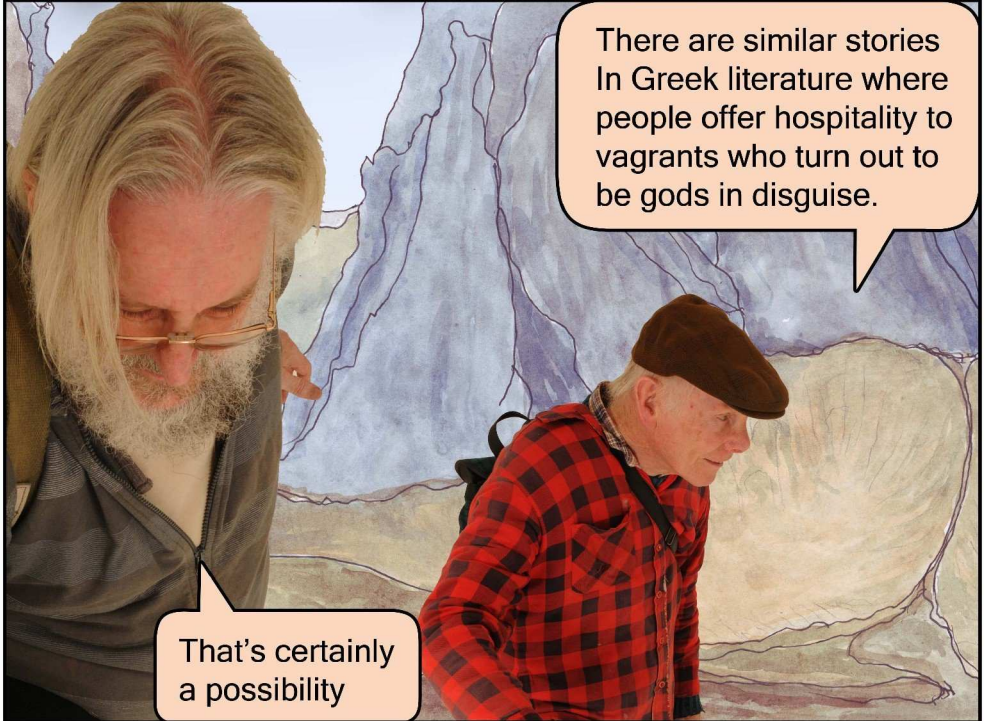
Gen 19. 6-9





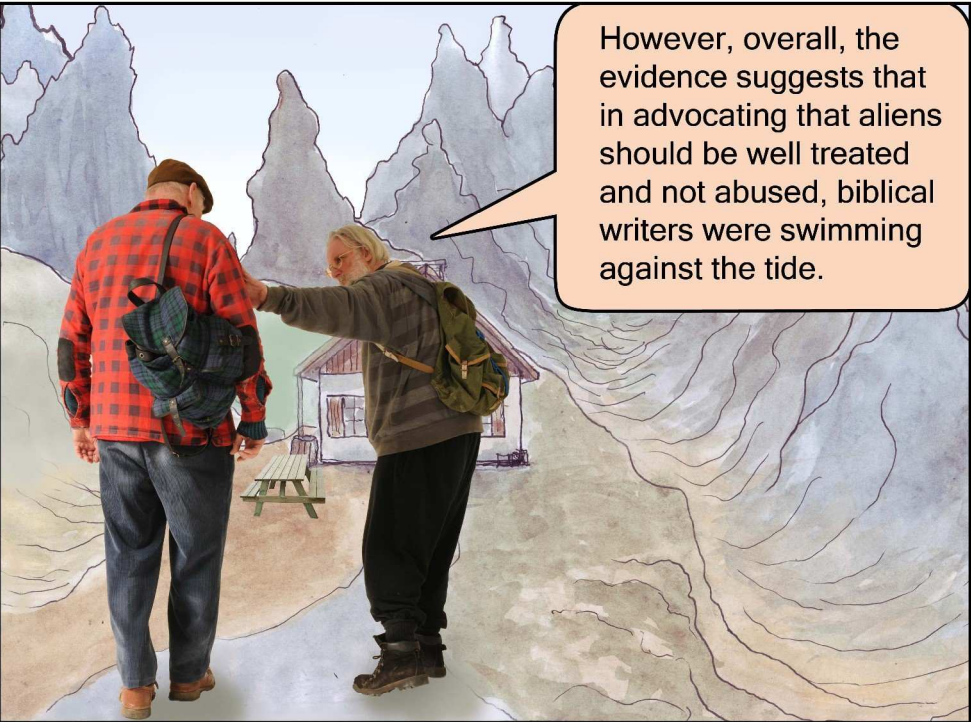
Ok. So what's this all about?

Isn't it about the importance of hospitality in the ancient world?



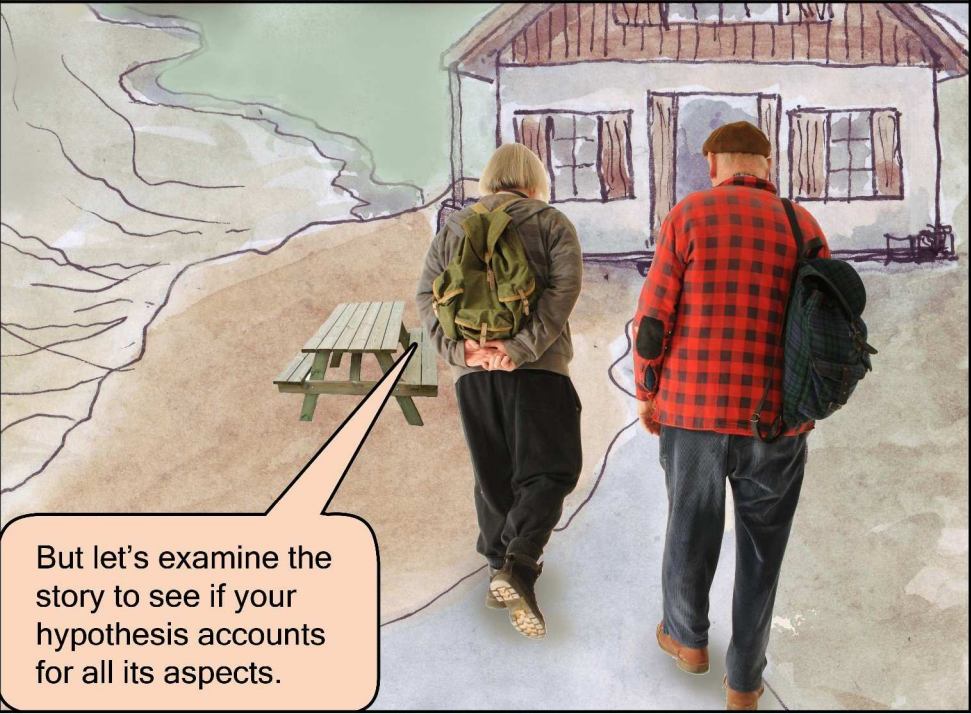
There are similar stories In Greek literature where people offer hospitality to vagrants who turn out to be gods in disguise.

That's certainly a possibility



However, overall, the evidence suggests that in advocating that aliens should be well treated and not abused, biblical writers were swimming against the tide.

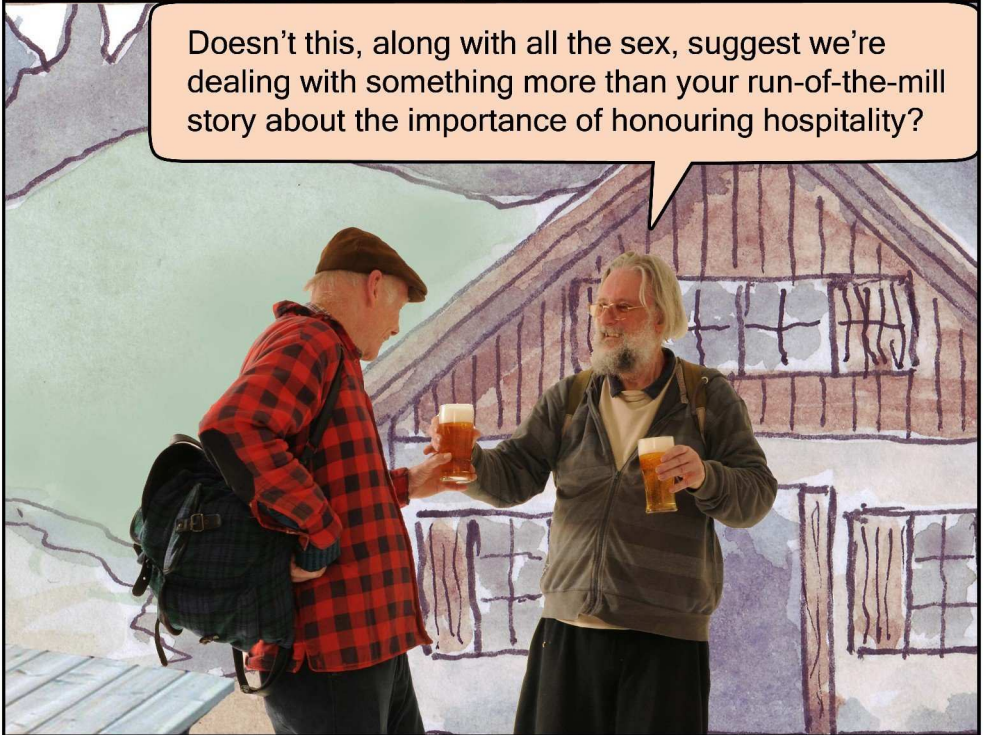
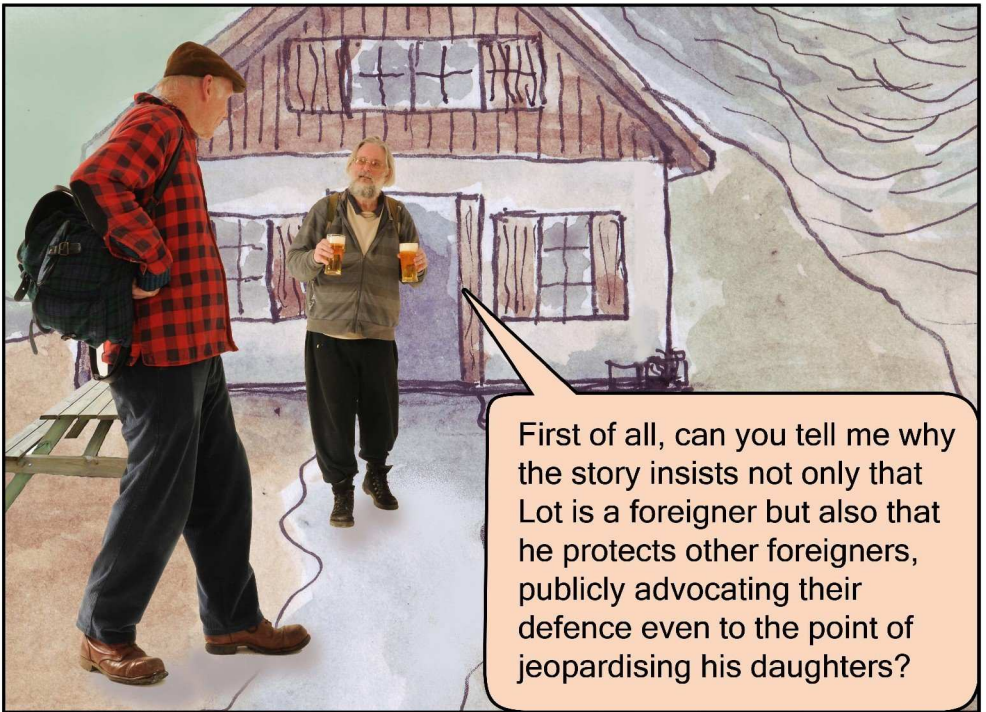
The illustration shows two men from behind, walking on a dirt path. The man on the left wears a red and black plaid shirt, blue jeans, and a green backpack. The man on the right wears a brown jacket, black pants, and a green backpack. They are walking towards a small wooden building with a red roof. In the background, there are jagged, grey mountains under a light blue sky. A wooden picnic table is visible on the left side of the path.



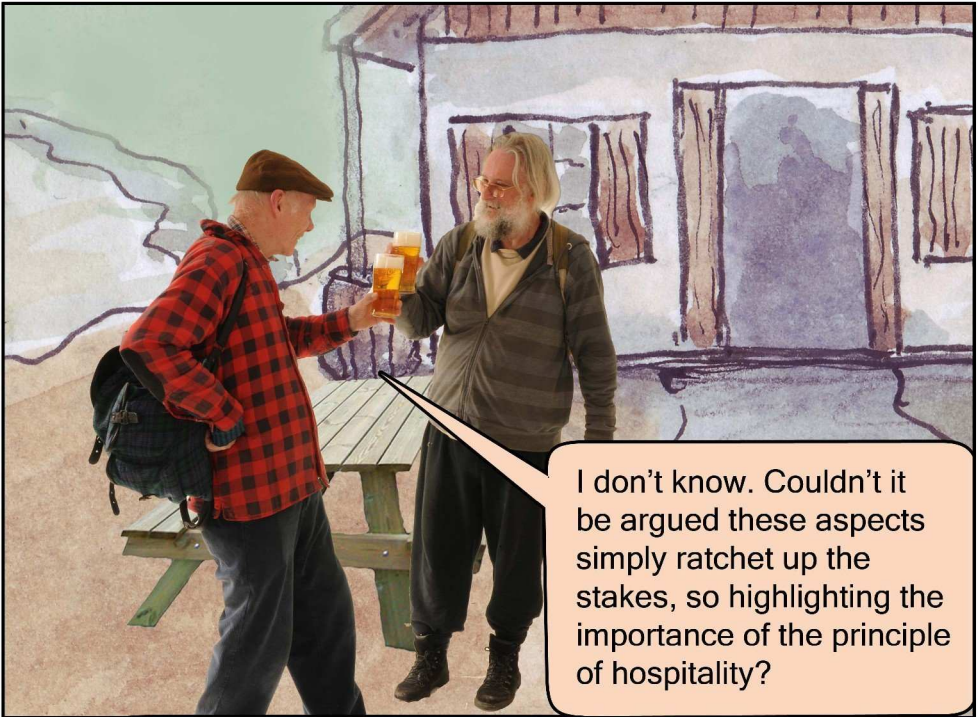
But let's examine the story to see if your hypothesis accounts for all its aspects.

The illustration shows the same two men from behind, walking away from the small wooden building. The man on the left is now wearing a brown jacket and black pants, and the man on the right is wearing a red and black plaid shirt and blue jeans. They are walking on a dirt path. The building is on the right side of the path, and the jagged mountains are in the background. A wooden picnic table is visible on the left side of the path.





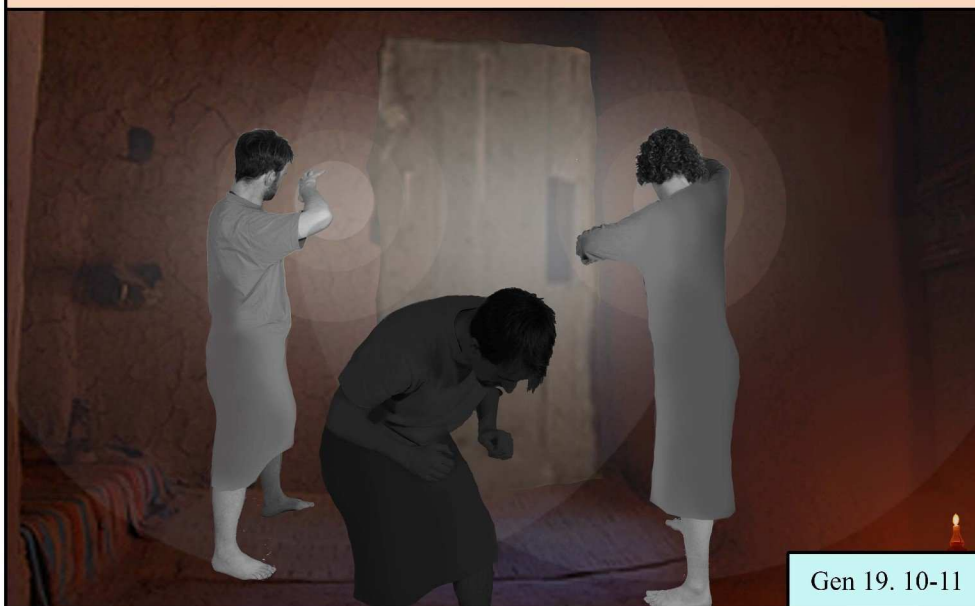




At this point, the two men inside reach out and pull Lot back into the house, firmly shutting the door afterwards.



They then proceed to strike the men outside, young and old, with blindness so they can't find the door to kick it in.



Gen 19. 10-11

Finally they have a few hasty words with Lot himself.

Do you have anyone else here in the city  
—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or  
anyone else who belongs to you?

You must get them out of  
here, because we have been  
sent to destroy this place.

So Lot ventures out to warn the two young men who are  
pledged to marry his daughters.

Gen 19. 12-14





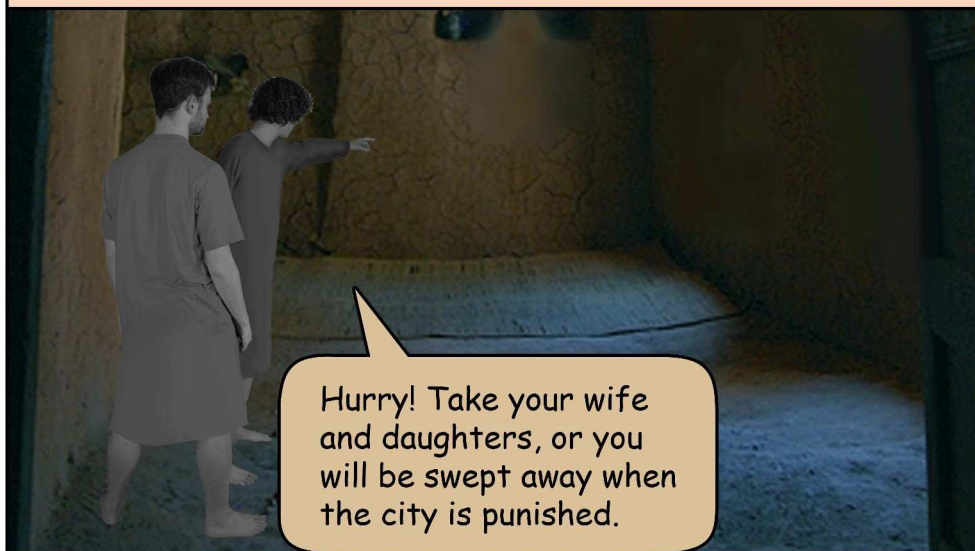
Hurry, you must  
get out of this  
place, for Yahweh  
is about to  
destroy the city!

But the young men think he's joking.



Gen 19. 12-14

Next morning, at the crack of dawn, the angels urge Lot to leave while he still can.



But Lot continues to hesitate so they grasp his hand and drag him away by force.



Having led Lot and his wife and daughters out of the city the angels give them instructions.

Flee for your lives! Don't look back. Don't stop anywhere till you reach the mountains or you will be swept away!"

But Lot is not happy about going into the mountains and he continues to stall.

Let me flee to Zoar - it is very small, isn't it? \*

\* Zoar means 'small'.

Very well, I will not overthrow the town you speak of. But be quick because I cannot do anything until you reach it.

Gen 19. 17-21



When eventually the family reaches Zoar, Yahweh rains down burning sulphur on the cities and the entire plain, killing everyone and destroying the vegetation.



So Lot is saved ... however, his wife disobeys the angels by looking back and is turned into a pillar of salt.



Gen 19. 24-26

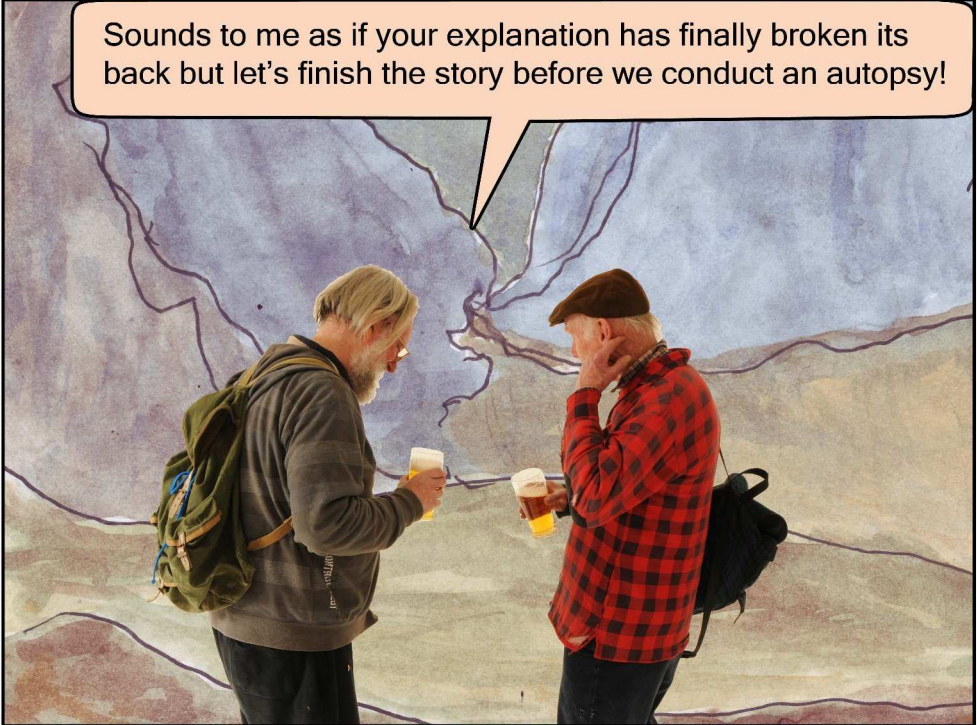
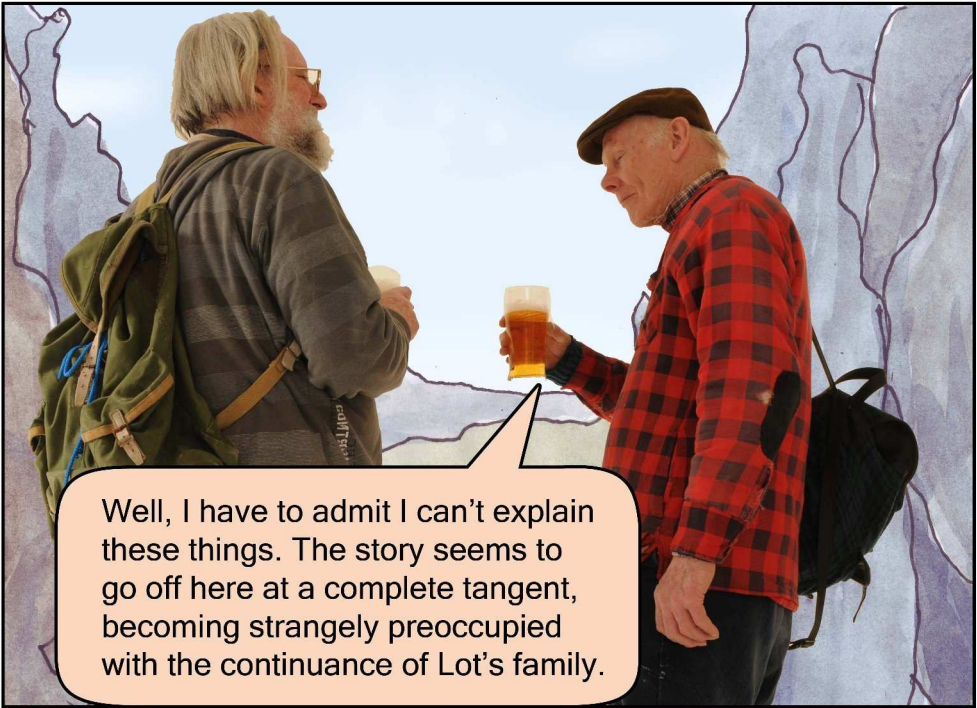
Being afraid now to stay in Zoar, Lot and his daughters retreat to the dreaded mountains where they live in a cave.



OK, given your thesis that this is a story about honouring hospitality, can you tell me why it portrays Lot as hyper-reluctant to leave Sodom and why it deprives him of his wife in such strange circumstances?

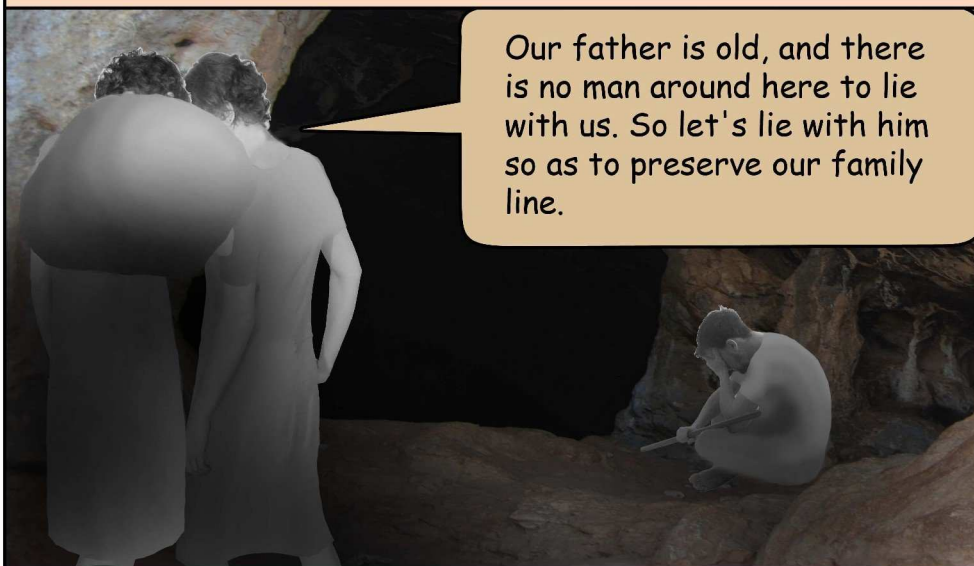








Very well: Lot and his two daughters are now safe in their mountain cave but there's a problem, for there are no men to provide them with children.



Lot's daughters ply him with wine till he becomes blind drunk.



Then the elder daughter lies down and has sex with her father who is completely oblivious to what is happening.



The next night the two daughters follow the same procedure...



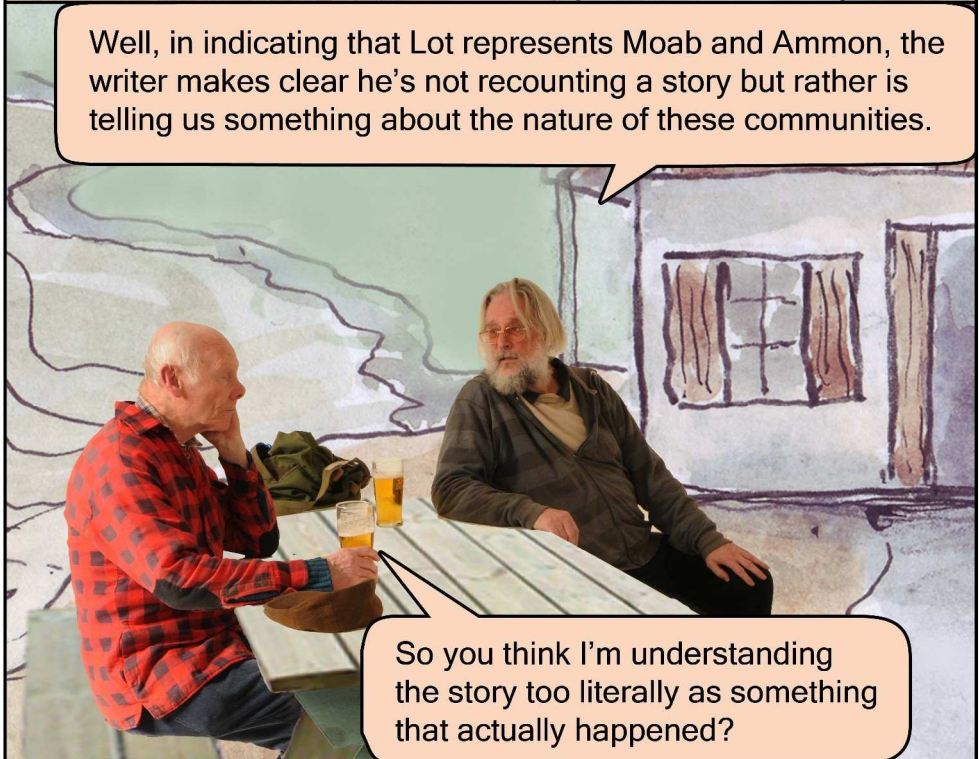
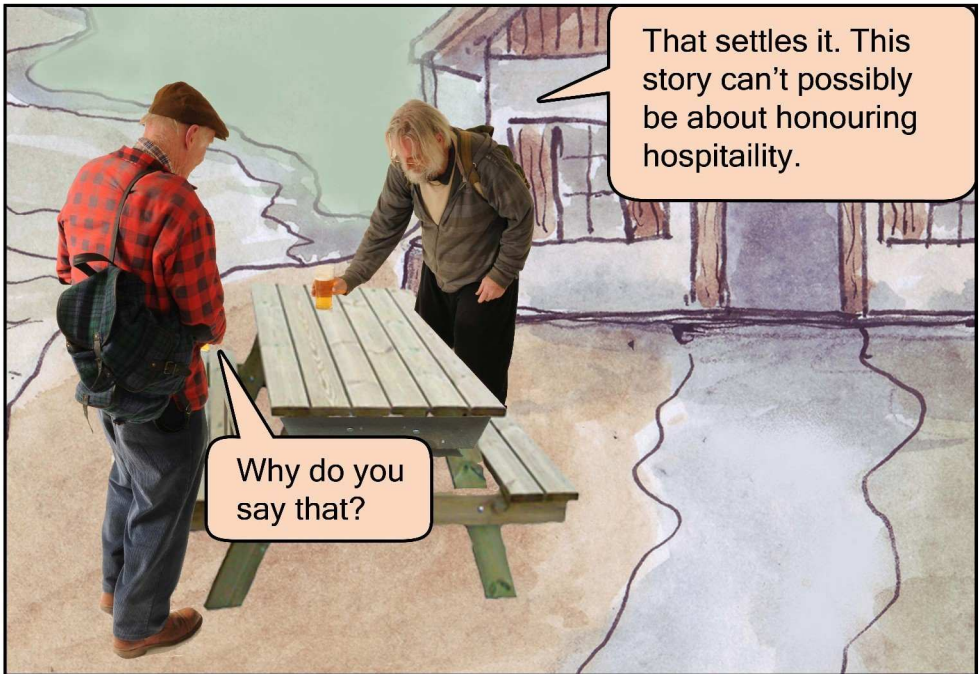
...only this time it's the younger daughter who takes her turn.



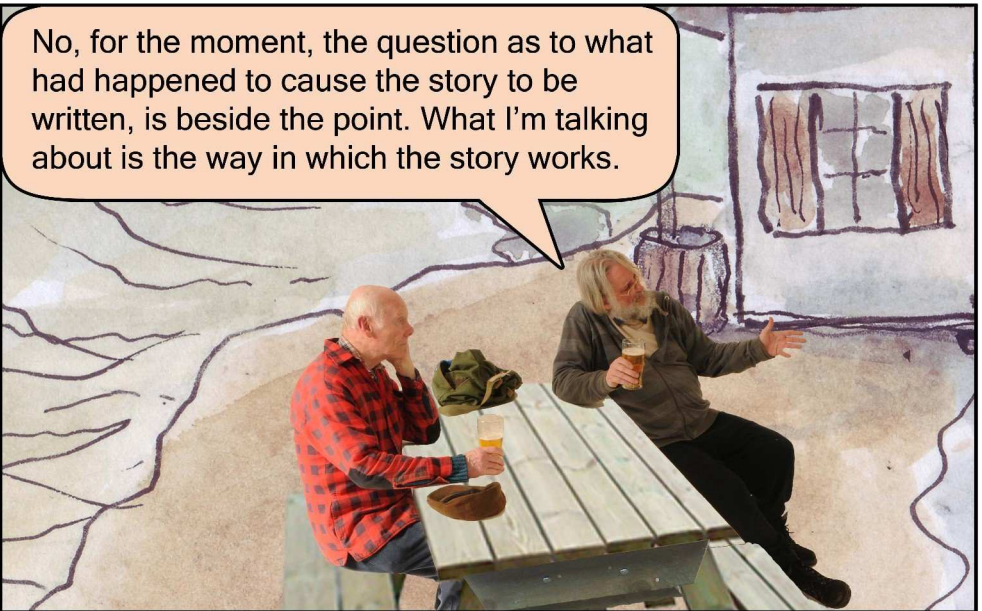
In this way both daughters have sons by their father. The older, Moab, becomes the father of the Moabites and the younger, Ben-Ammi, becomes the father of the Ammonites.







No, for the moment, the question as to what had happened to cause the story to be written, is beside the point. What I'm talking about is the way in which the story works.



We take it for granted that all stories, including fairytales, tell us about things that supposedly happened; listeners being free to choose to believe or not, as they wish.

So the handsome prince killed the fearsome dragon and took Matilda back with him to his castle.

Daddy, did that actually happen?



No of course not. Silly!



However, that's not the case with these representational stories, which for us really aren't stories, for they trade in situations that don't even pretend to be believable.



Stories that aren't really stories!  
You baffle me completely!





Can't you see that, as representations, these tales don't aspire to be believable in the way stories generally do.

'I say, God, Sarah wants rid of my son!' 'Don't worry Abraham, just kick him out as she says!'

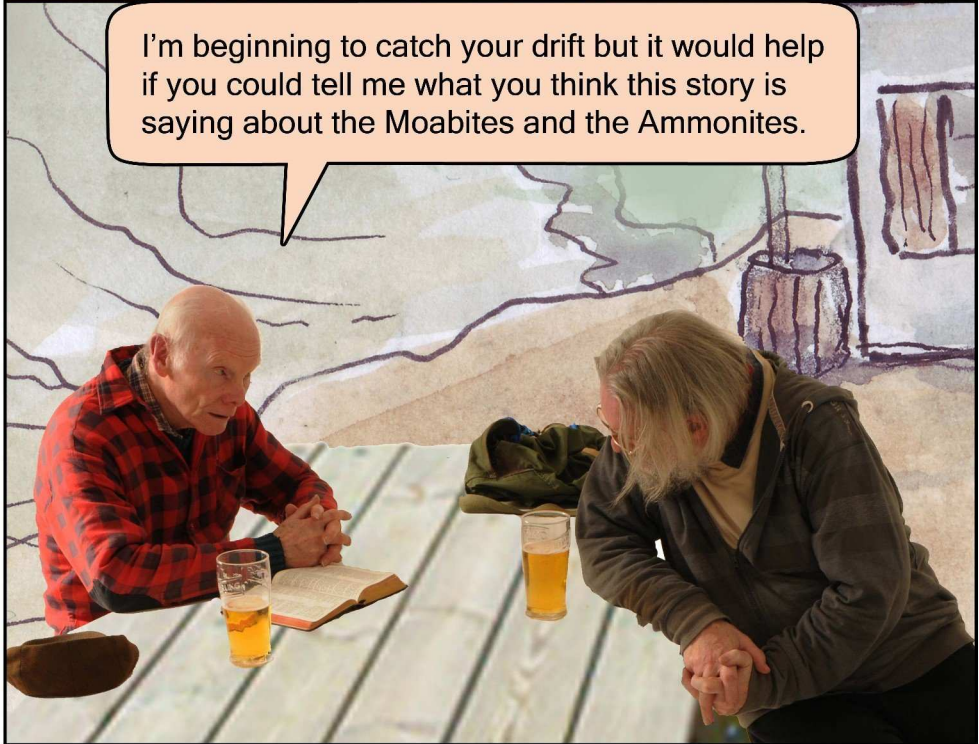
'Hallo God! What's happening today?'  
'Hallo Abraham. Today you're going to sacrifice your son.'

'O dear there aren't any men here!'  
'Don't fret, we're just going to have to go to bed with Daddy!'

Yes I kind of see what you mean!



That said, taken on their own terms, what these tales say is most certainly historical comment, whether one judges the comment is valid or not.



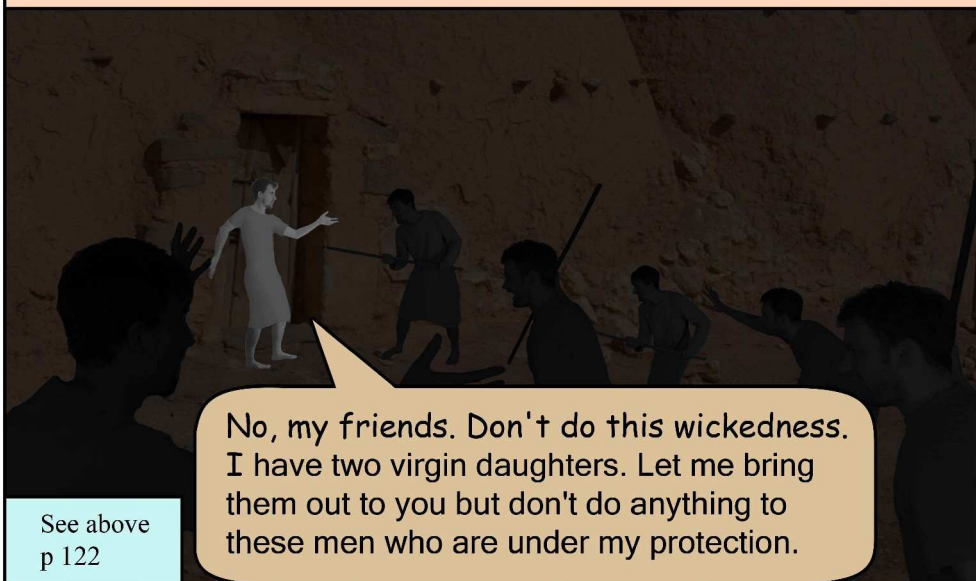
I'm beginning to catch your drift but it would help if you could tell me what you think this story is saying about the Moabites and the Ammonites.



Well clearly, the first thing it's saying is that they are Israel's cousin communities, which must mean the writer sees them too as Hebrew marginals ideologically close to Israel.



It reinforces this view by using the honouring of hospitality to represent the Moabites' and Ammonites' marginal perspective which contrasts so sharply with the civilisational perspective of the Sodomites who see foreigners as fair game, just as we do.

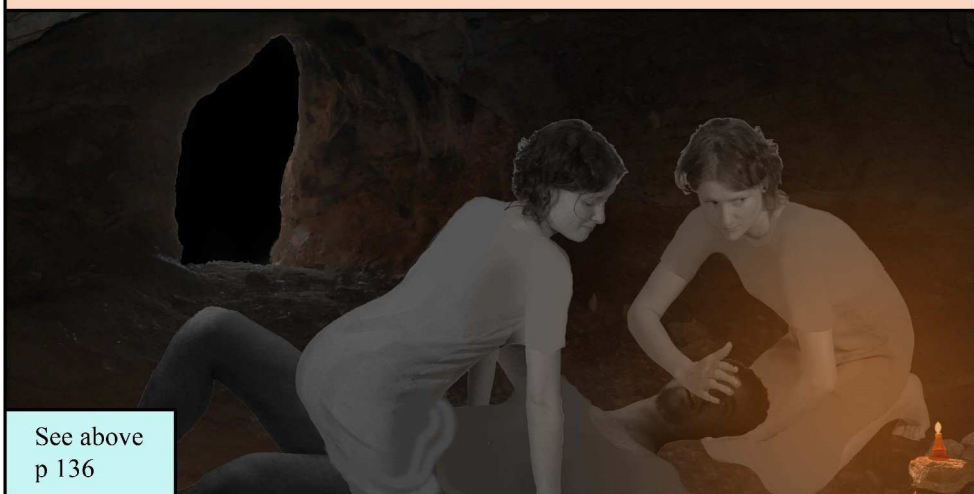


No, my friends. Don't do this wickedness. I have two virgin daughters. Let me bring them out to you but don't do anything to these men who are under my protection.

See above  
p 122



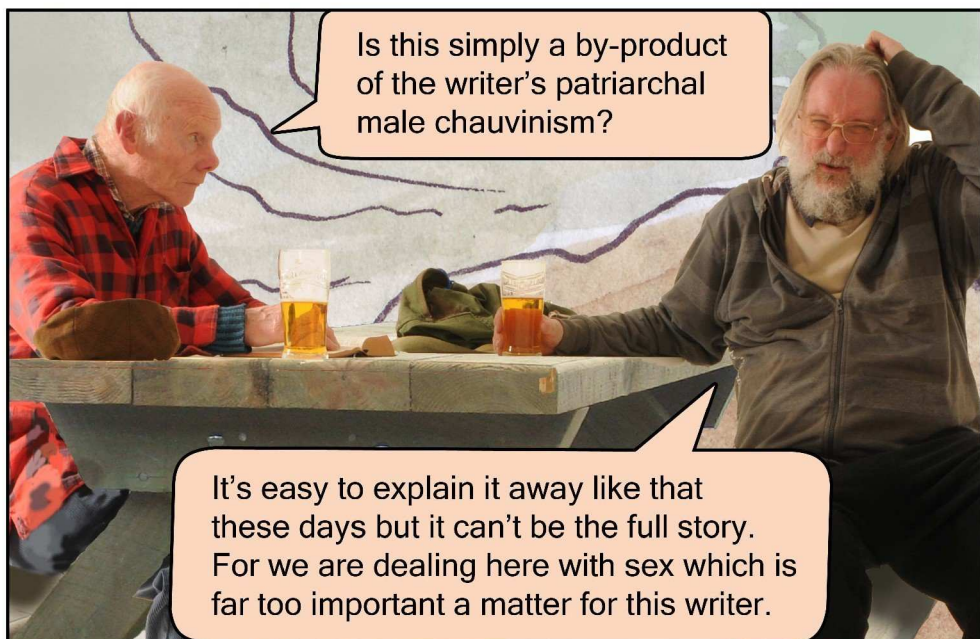
You should also note the way in which the story protects Lot's marginal honour by shielding him from blame for the incestuous way in which his family line is maintained.



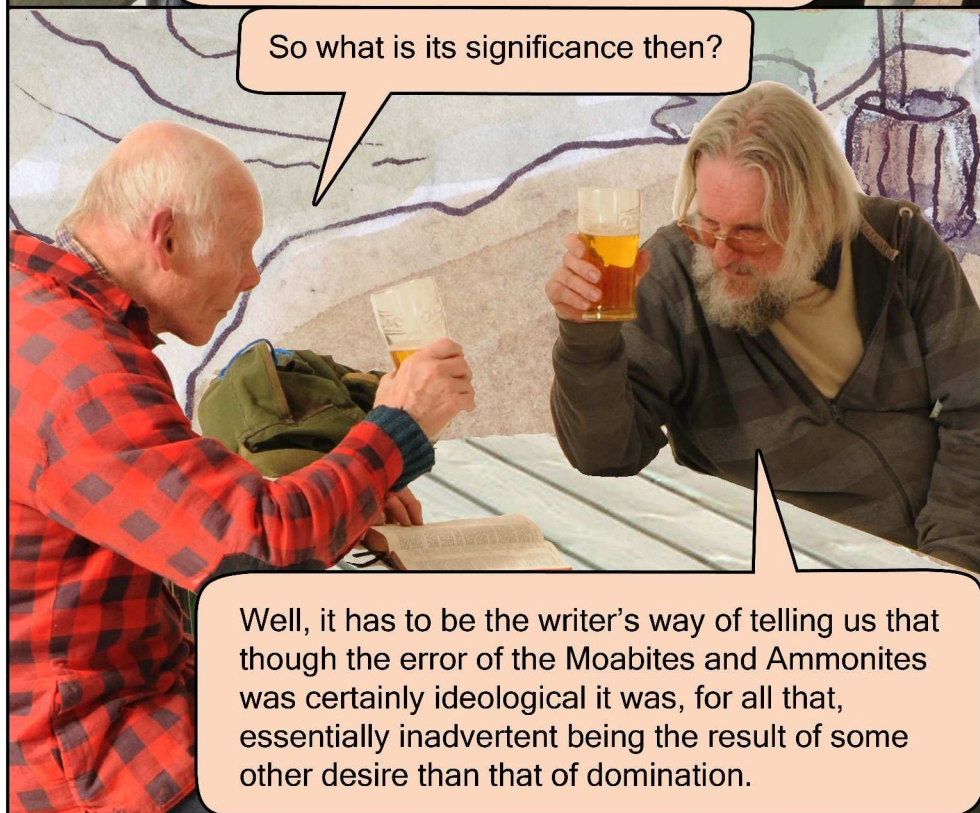
See above  
p 136

As is the case in the Abraham story, it's the women relations who demonstrate lack of political faith, not the patriarch himself.





It's easy to explain it away like that these days but it can't be the full story. For we are dealing here with sex which is far too important a matter for this writer.







That deals with the positive aspects of the story. The critical aspects are just as important.

Go on. I'm listening!



Well, as we've already noted, Lot is criticised for choosing to live in one of the cities of the fertile Jordan plain...



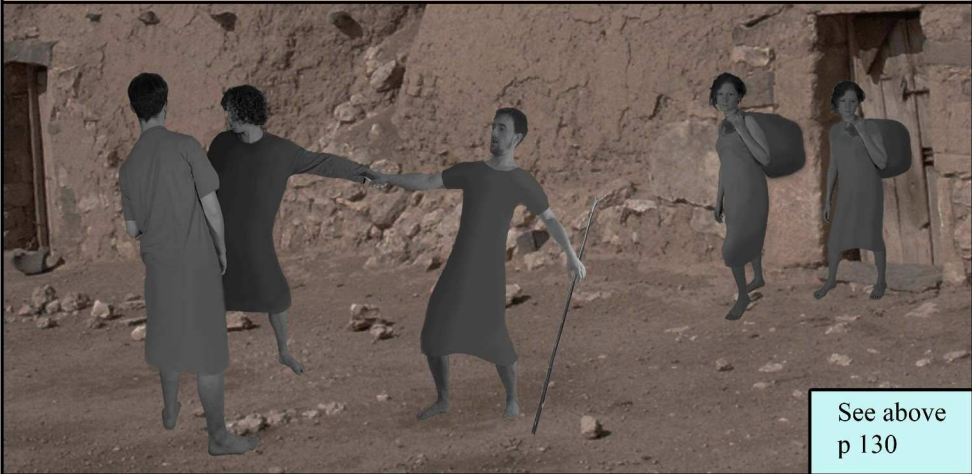
See above  
p 116

... a choice that is likened to a misplaced desire to return to the garden of Eden or else to the fleshpots of Egypt.



See above  
p 118

This theme of Lot's choice to live in the comfort of a city is not confined to this reference to Eden and Egypt. It runs right through the story, reappearing first in his great reluctance to quit Sodom...



See above  
p 130

... and then, again, in his plea to be allowed to flee to the small town of Zoar so as to avoid the dreaded mountains.



Let me flee to Zoar - it  
is very small, isn't it?

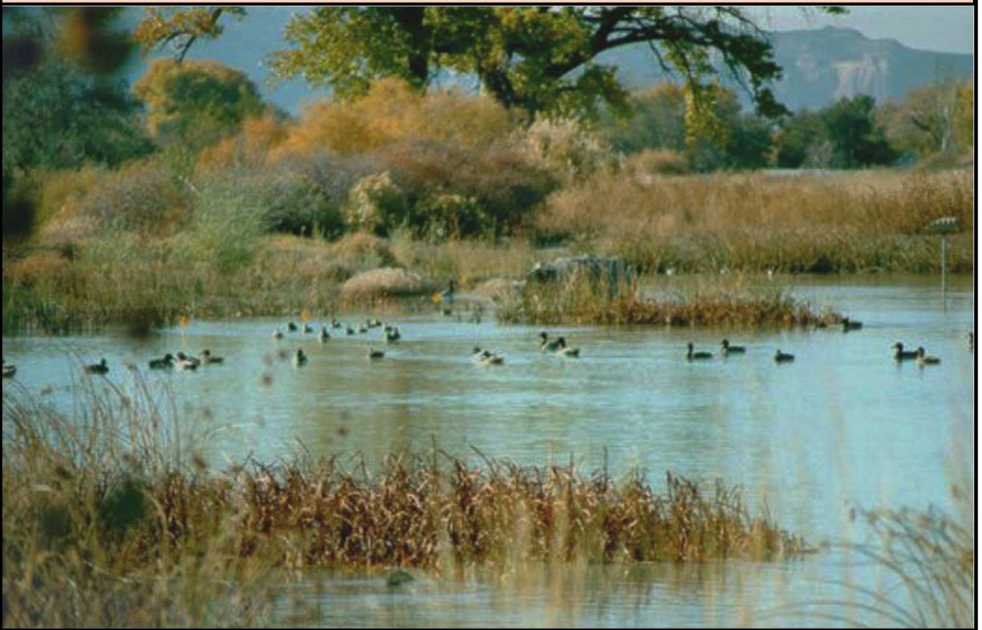
See above  
p 131



Moreover, what's interesting is that these cities in the Jordan valley never in fact existed. For the terrain bordering the Dead Sea in the south was far too salty for vegetation to grow...

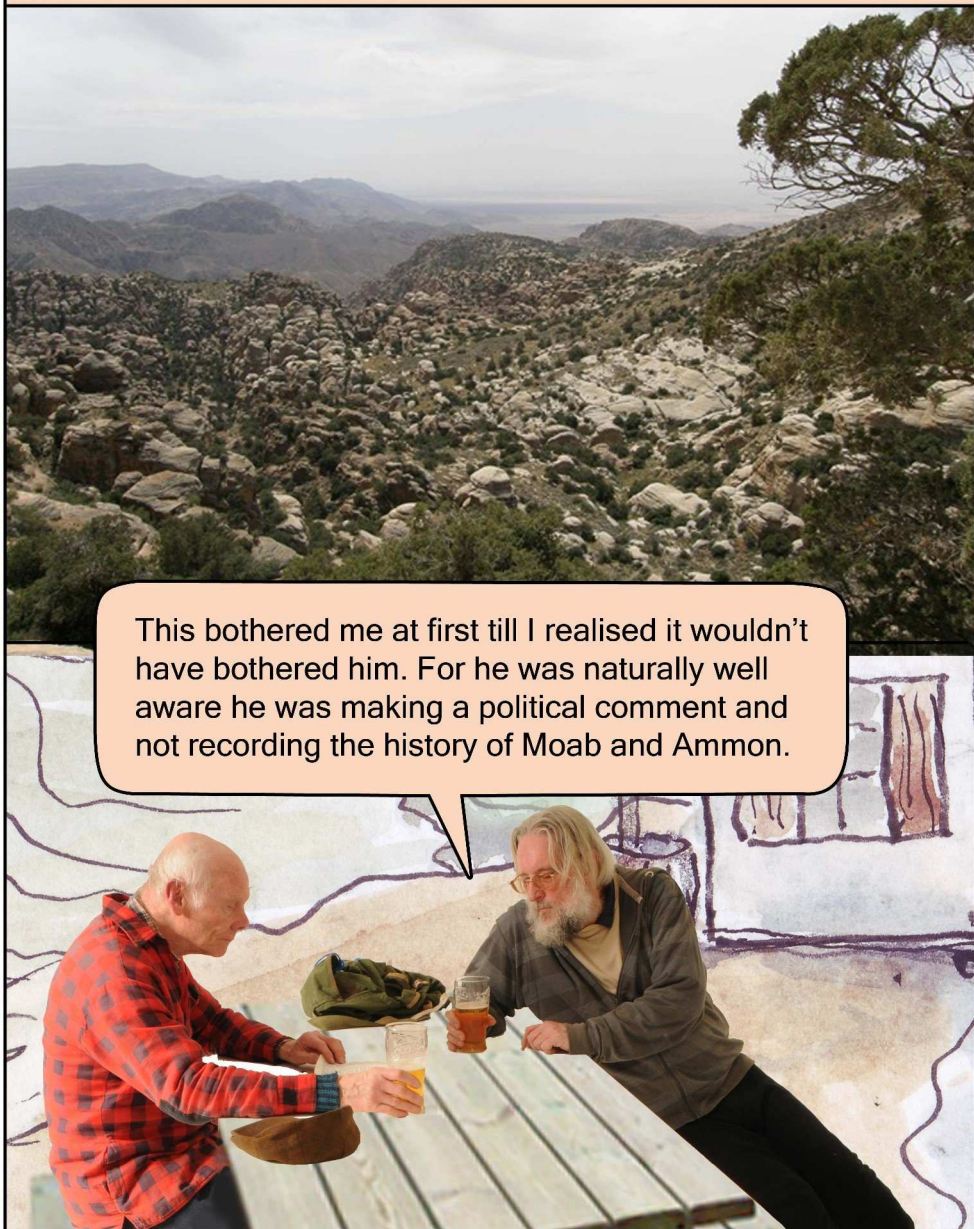


... whereas in the north the land was a malaria-filled swamp which only became usable in modern time as a result of advanced drainage-technology.

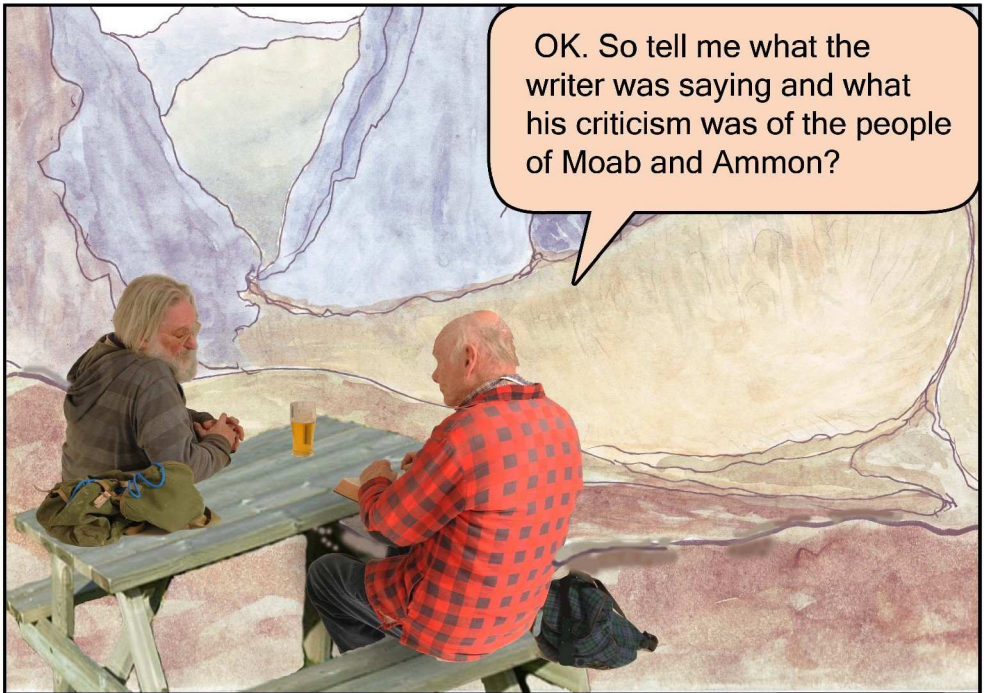




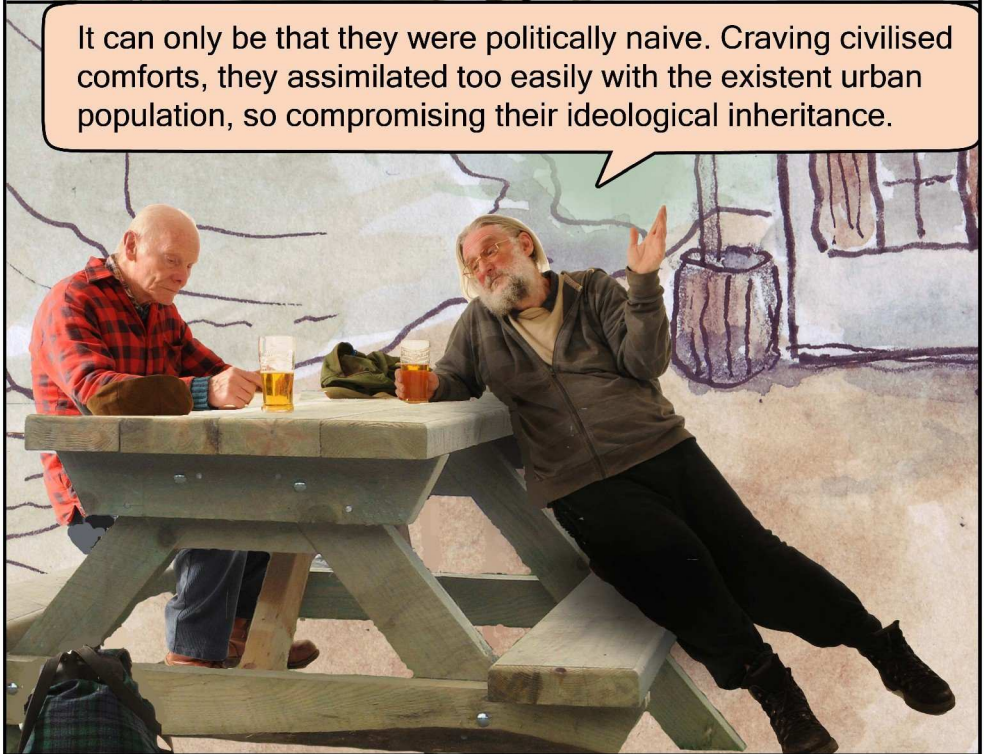
The Hebrew writer shows he was aware of this reality for he alludes to the salty barrenness of the Jordan plain and correctly places Moab and Ammon in the trans-Jordanian highlands. This can only mean that his story was pure fiction...



This bothered me at first till I realised it wouldn't have bothered him. For he was naturally well aware he was making a political comment and not recording the history of Moab and Ammon.



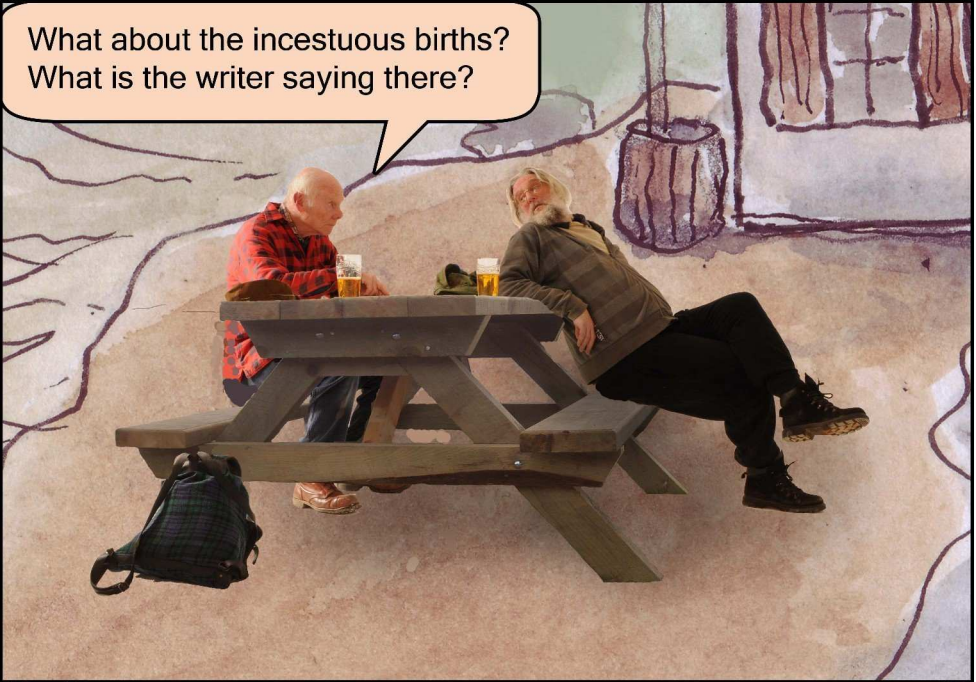
OK. So tell me what the writer was saying and what his criticism was of the people of Moab and Ammon?



It can only be that they were politically naive. Craving civilised comforts, they assimilated too easily with the existent urban population, so compromising their ideological inheritance.



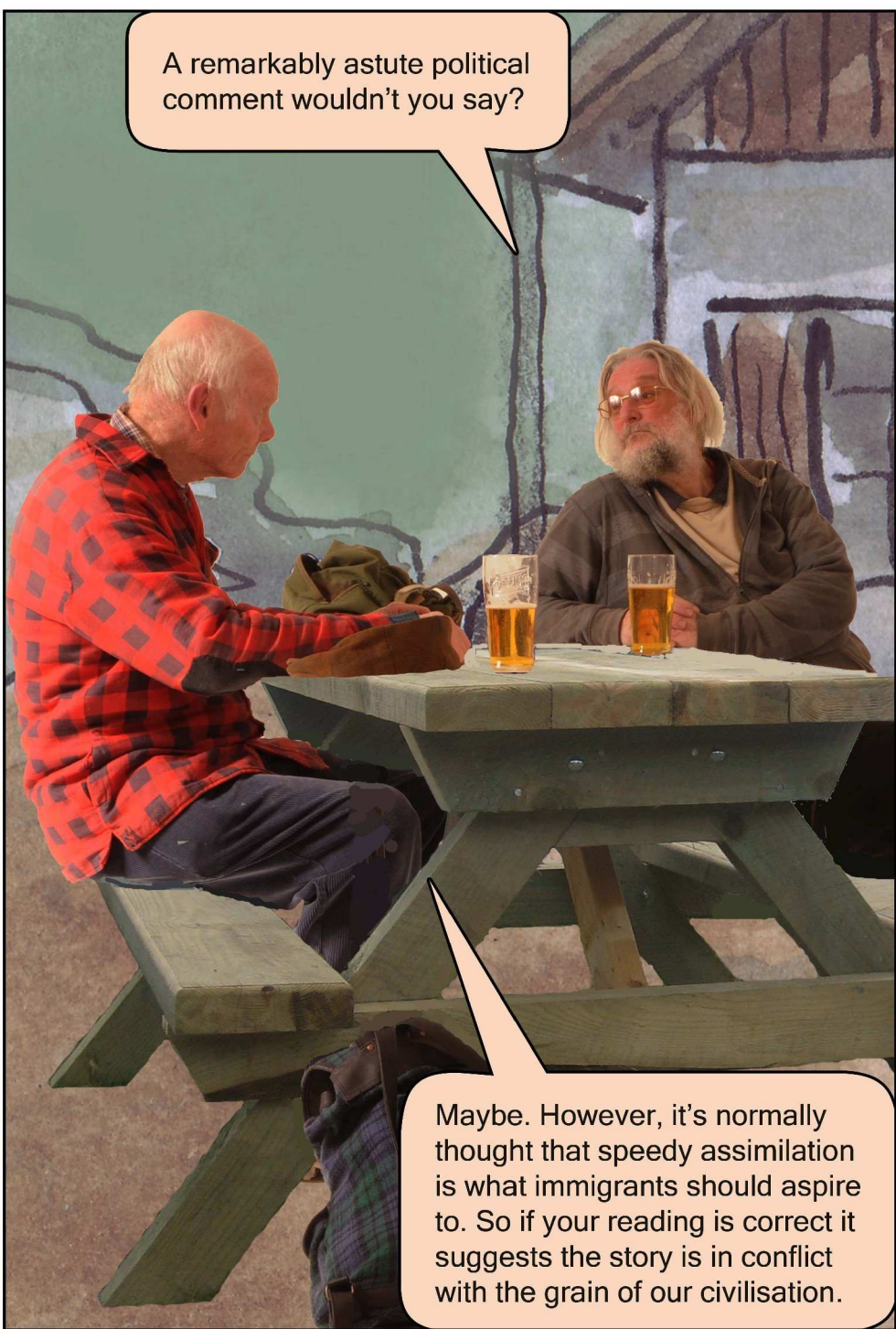
What about the incestuous births?  
What is the writer saying there?



He's saying that, as with the Ishmaelites' lack of organisation, so too the Moabites' and Ammonites' desperate yearning for the comforts of civilisation has excluded them from being the god of the marginals' legitimate standard-bearer.

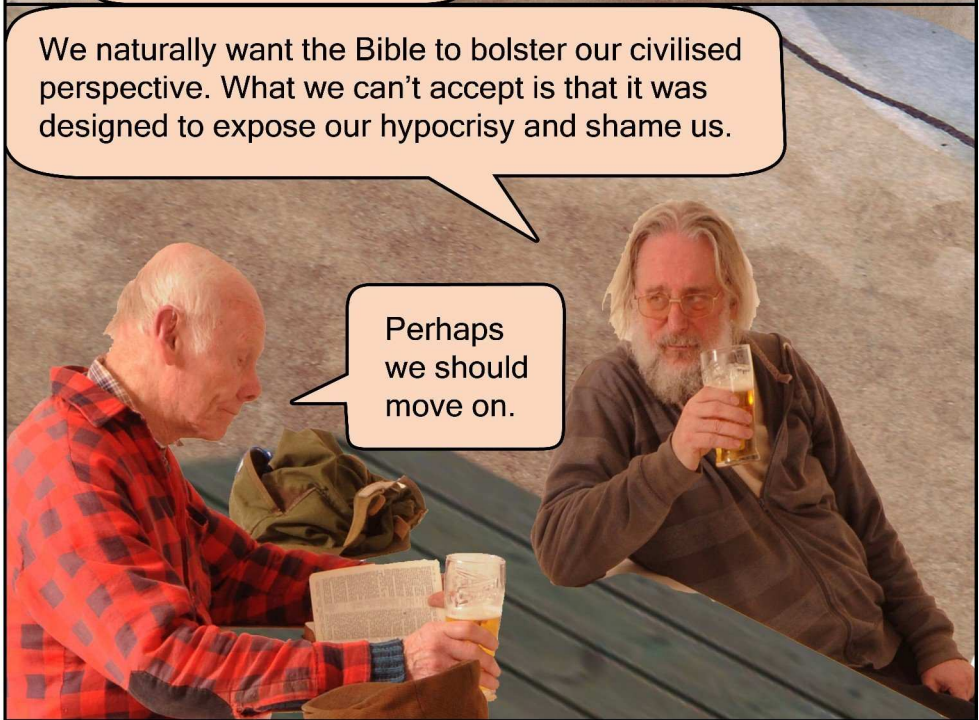






A remarkably astute political comment wouldn't you say?

Maybe. However, it's normally thought that speedy assimilation is what immigrants should aspire to. So if your reading is correct it suggests the story is in conflict with the grain of our civilisation.



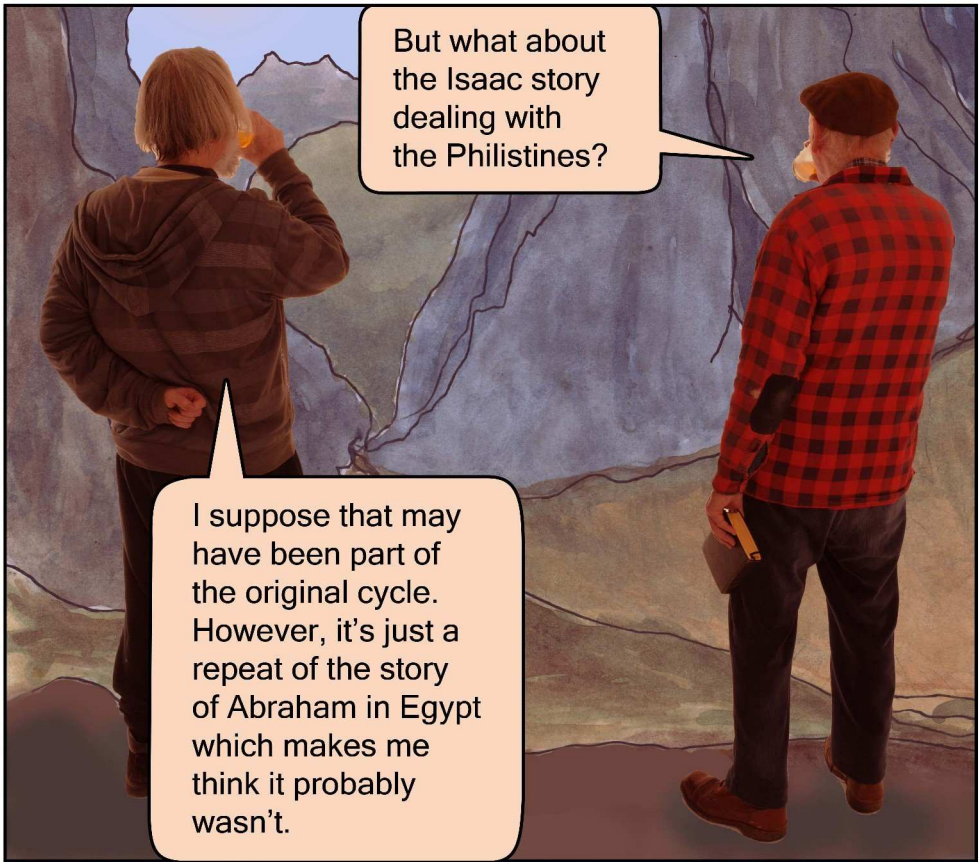
# 8

## Jacob and Esau

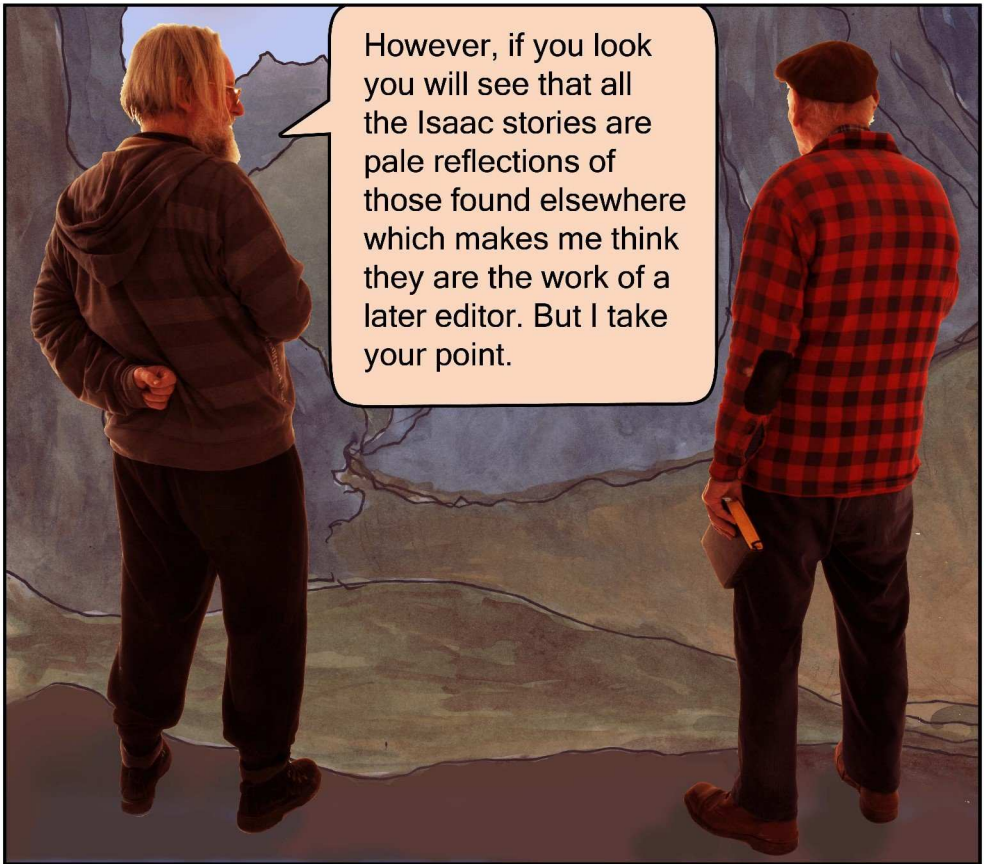




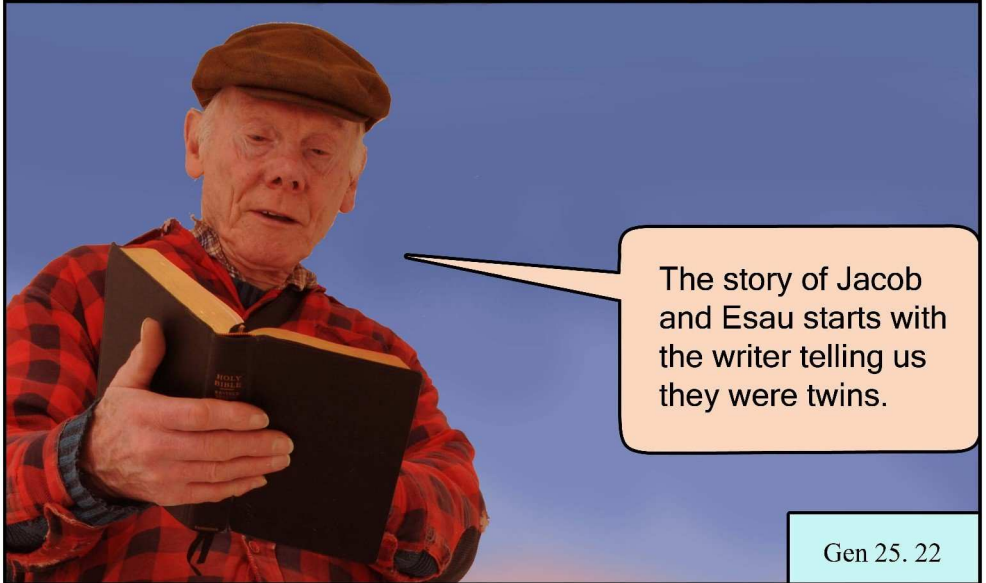






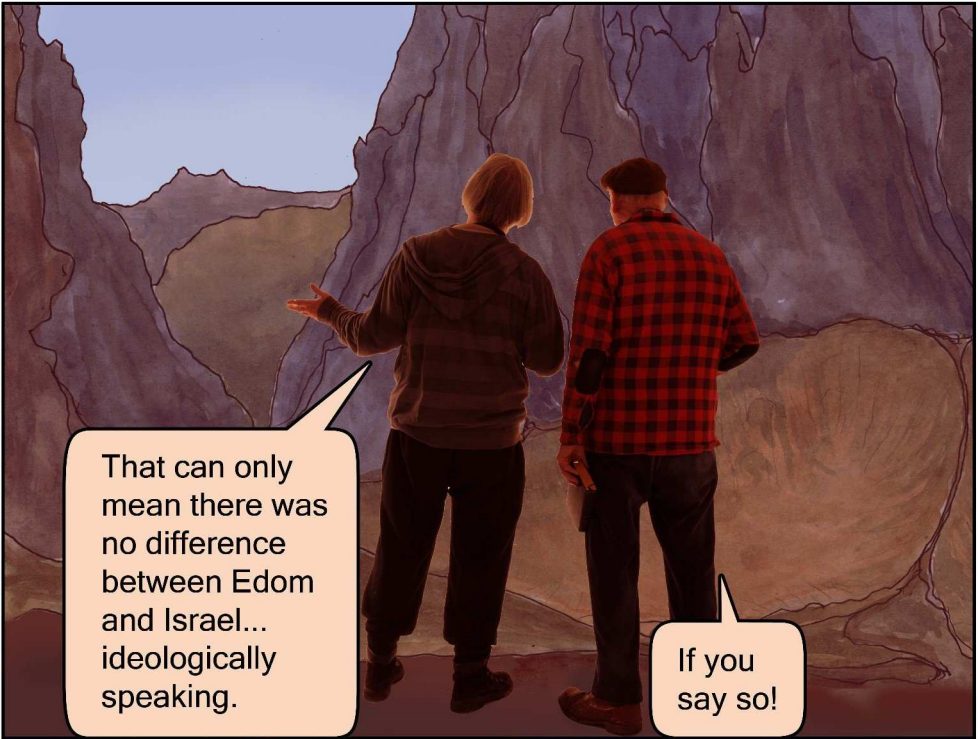


However, if you look you will see that all the Isaac stories are pale reflections of those found elsewhere which makes me think they are the work of a later editor. But I take your point.



The story of Jacob and Esau starts with the writer telling us they were twins.

Gen 25. 22



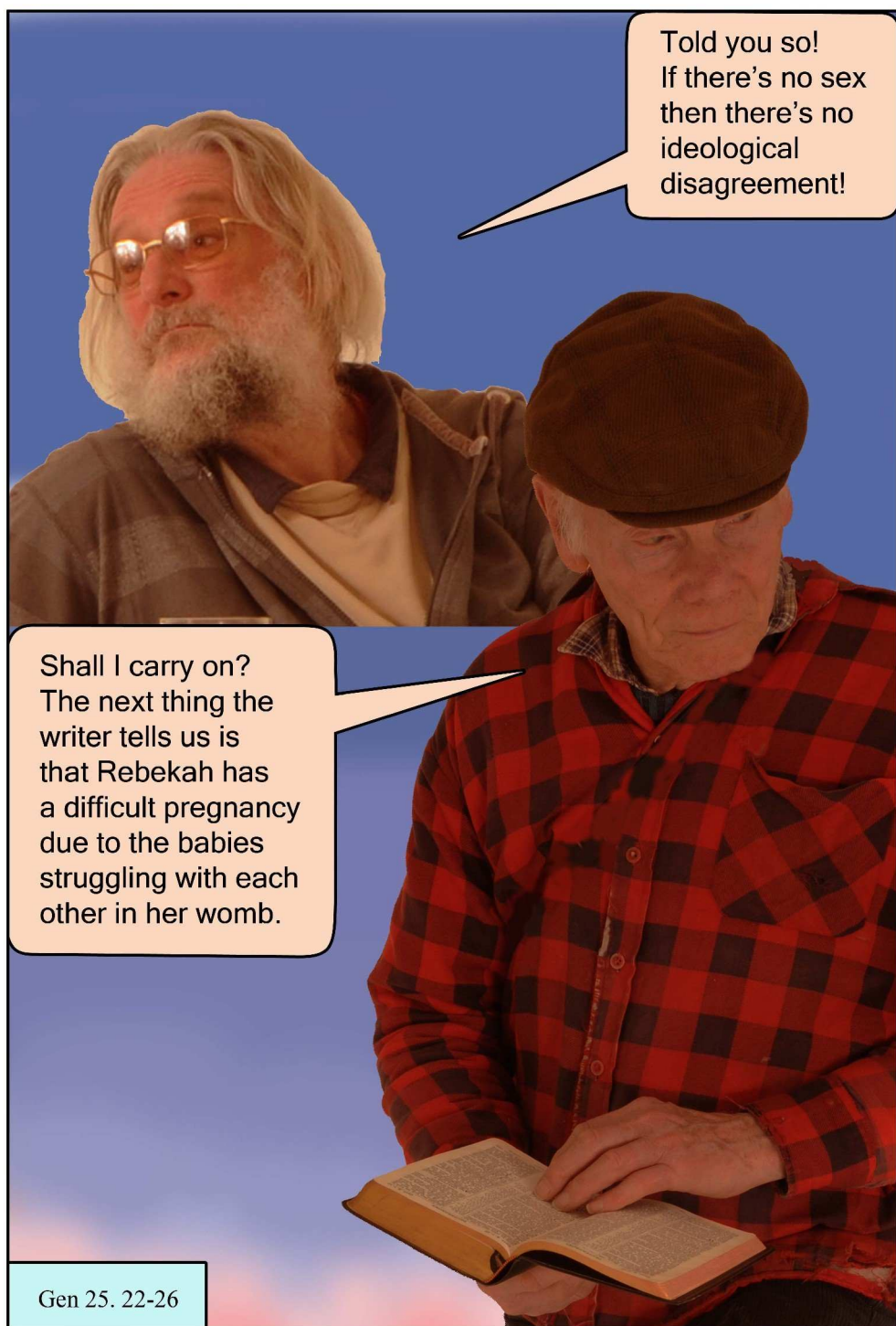
That can only mean there was no difference between Edom and Israel... ideologically speaking.

If you say so!



Well you know the story! Is there any sex in it?

Not really. There's a lot of competition and jealousy but no sex!

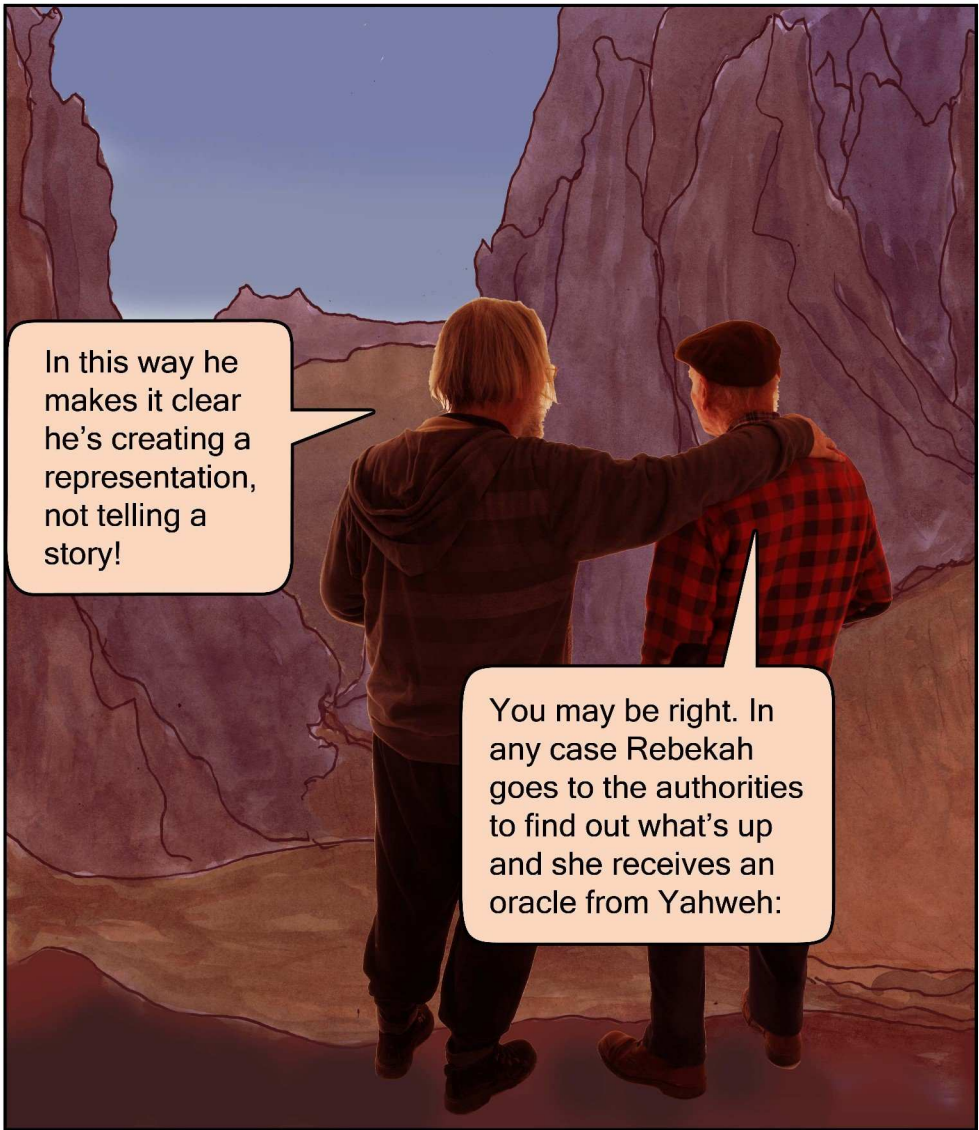


Told you so!  
If there's no sex  
then there's no  
ideological  
disagreement!

Shall I carry on?  
The next thing the  
writer tells us is  
that Rebekah has  
a difficult pregnancy  
due to the babies  
struggling with each  
other in her womb.

Gen 25. 22-26





In this way he makes it clear he's creating a representation, not telling a story!

You may be right. In any case Rebekah goes to the authorities to find out what's up and she receives an oracle from Yahweh:

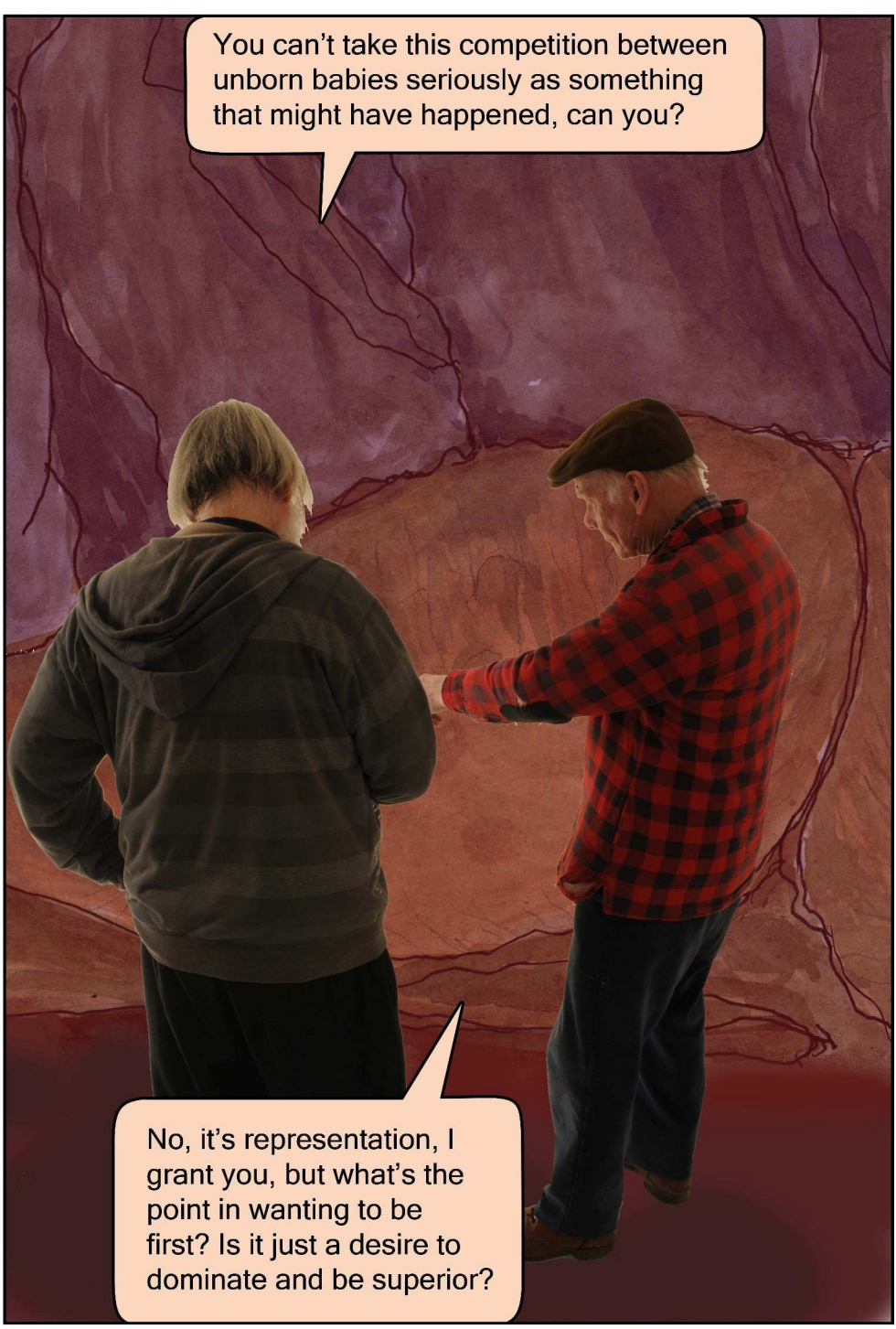
*"Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples from within you will be separated;  
one people will be stronger than the other,  
and the older will serve the younger."*

Gen 25. 23



... Esau, who is covered in red hair, comes out first,  
immediately followed by Jacob clinging to his heel.



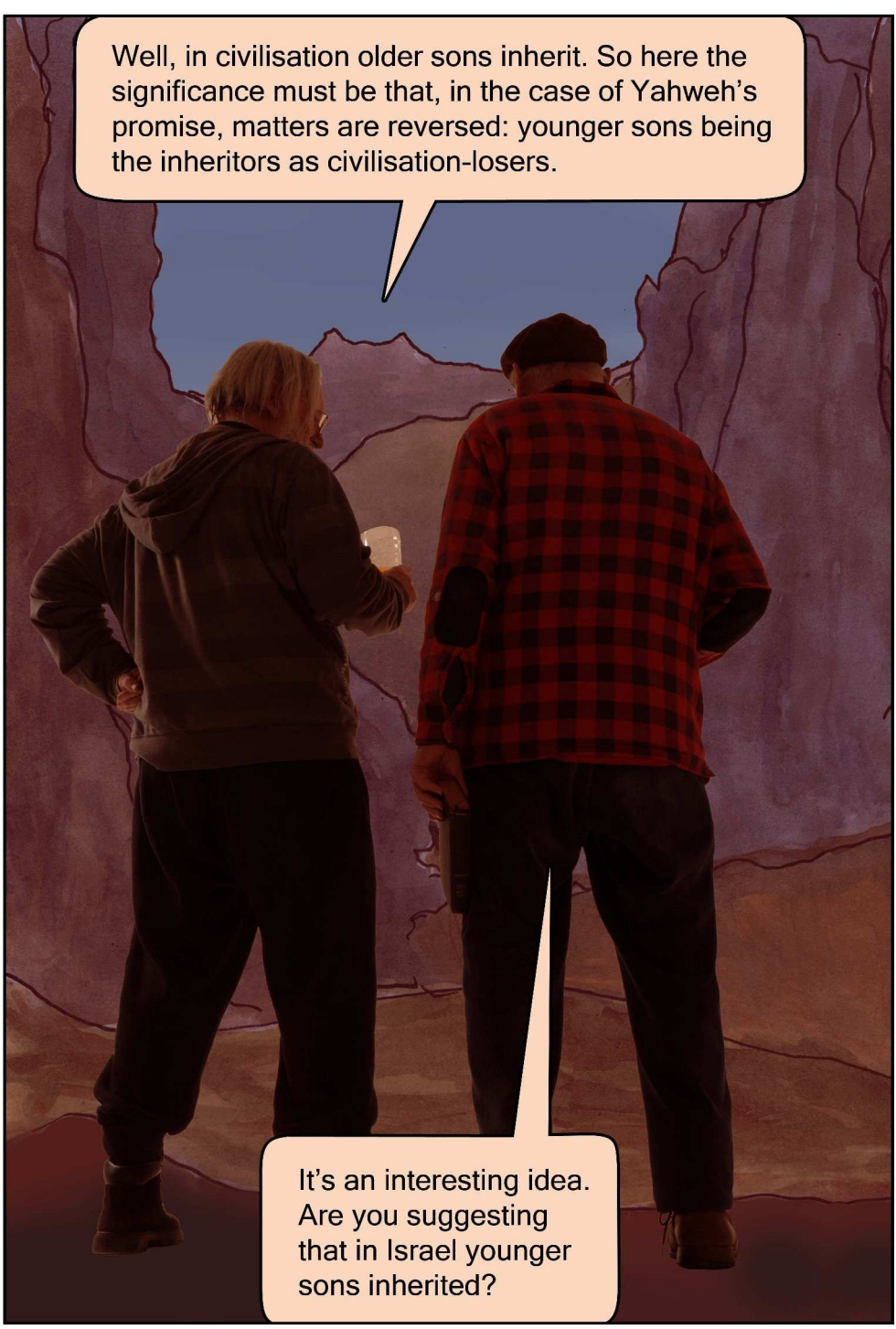


You can't take this competition between unborn babies seriously as something that might have happened, can you?

No, it's representation, I grant you, but what's the point in wanting to be first? Is it just a desire to dominate and be superior?







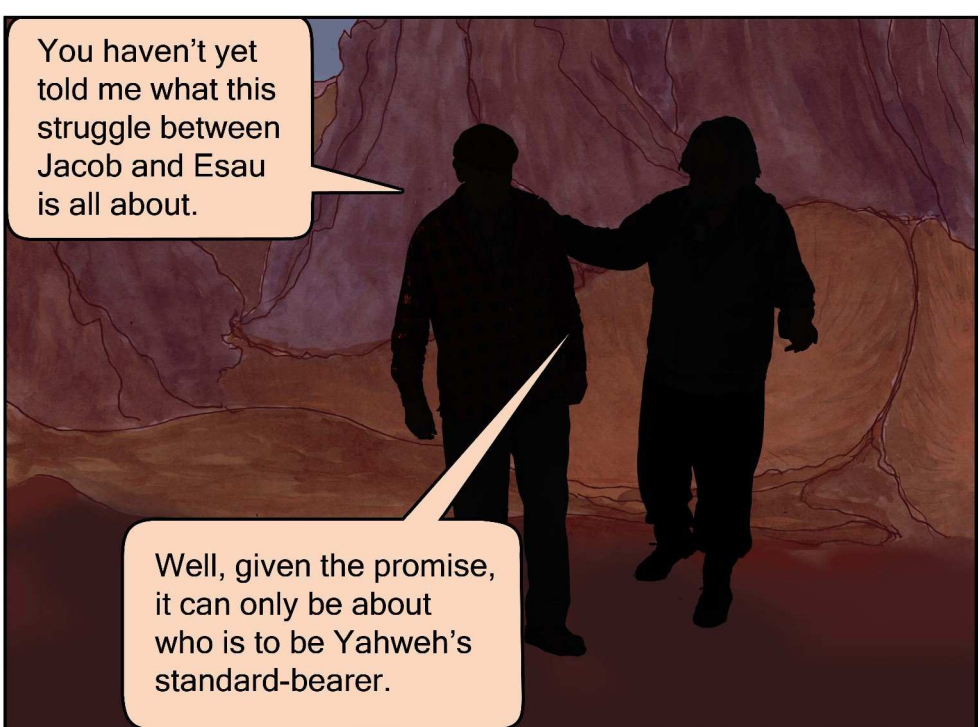
Well, in civilisation older sons inherit. So here the significance must be that, in the case of Yahweh's promise, matters are reversed: younger sons being the inheritors as civilisation-losers.

It's an interesting idea. Are you suggesting that in Israel younger sons inherited?

No of course not. We are not dealing with such civilisation matters. The writer's simply reminding us we are talking about the god of the marginals and his inheritance where losers are winners.

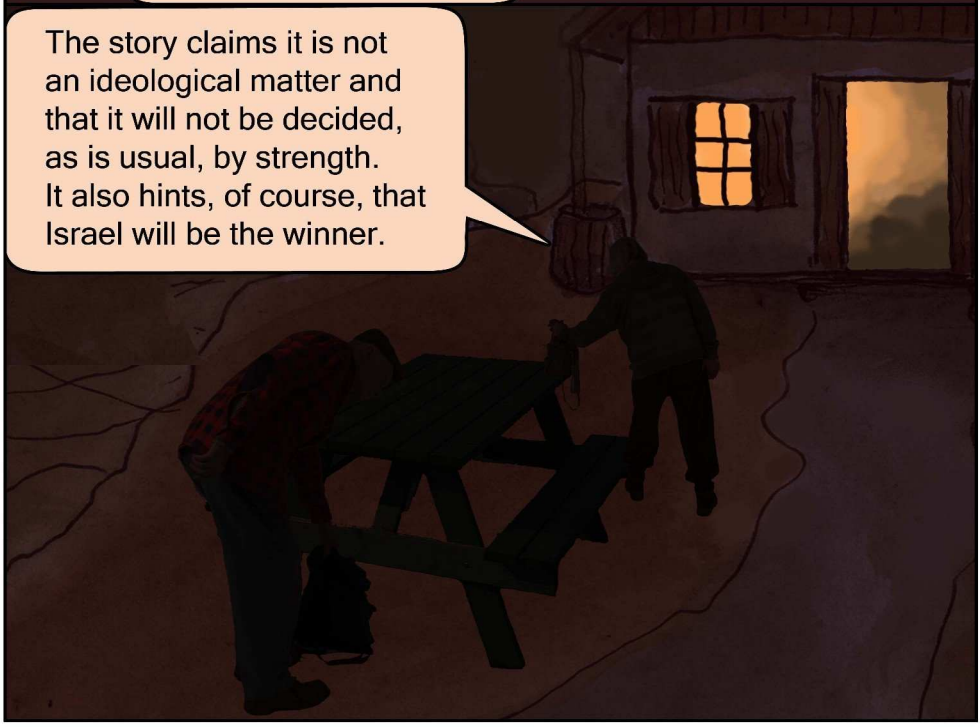
I'll have to think about that. Let's go inside.



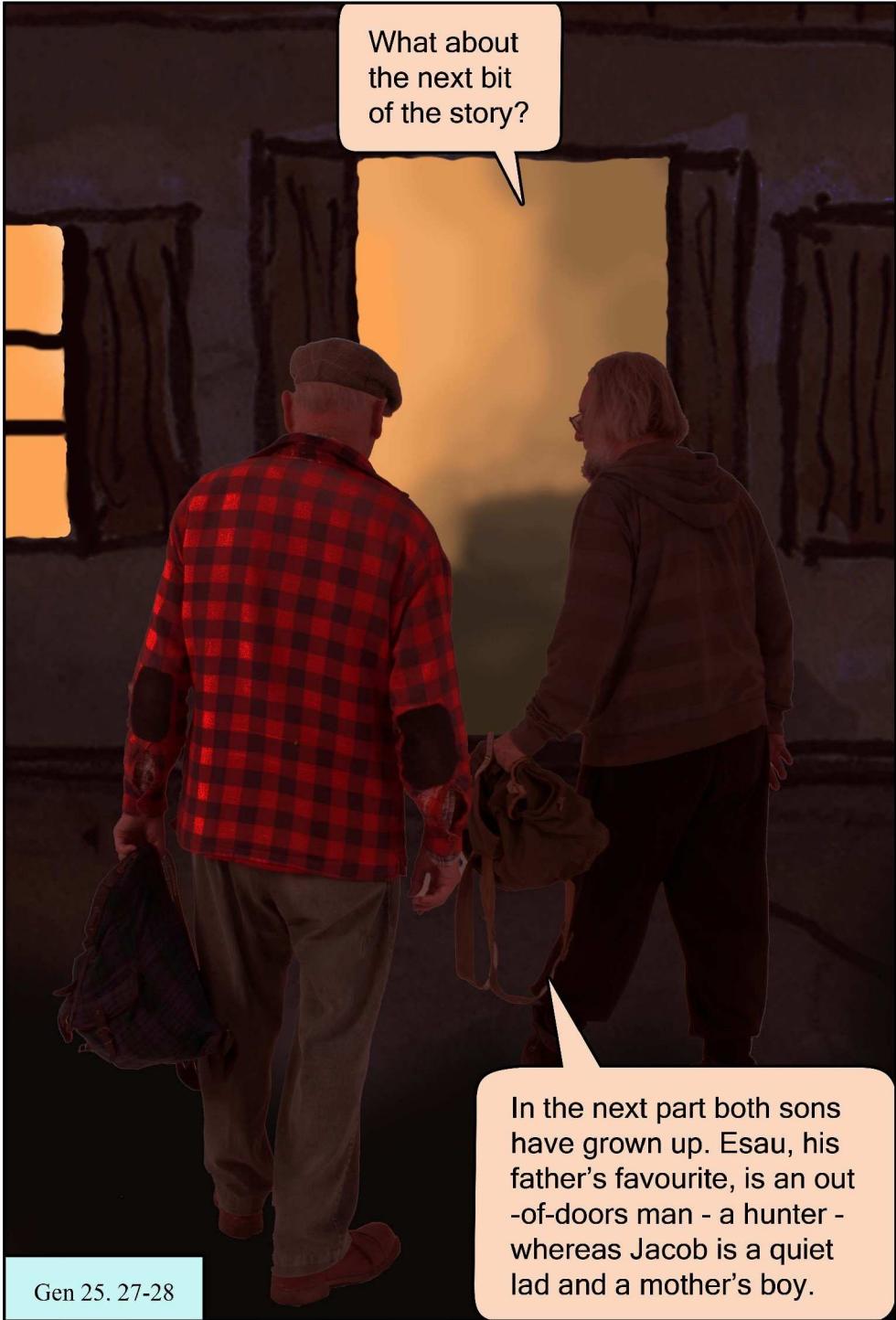


You haven't yet told me what this struggle between Jacob and Esau is all about.

Well, given the promise, it can only be about who is to be Yahweh's standard-bearer.



The story claims it is not an ideological matter and that it will not be decided, as is usual, by strength. It also hints, of course, that Israel will be the winner.

A man and a woman are walking away from the viewer towards a bright doorway in a dark room. The man is on the left, wearing a red and black checkered shirt, grey trousers, and a flat cap. He is carrying a dark bag. The woman is on the right, wearing a dark hoodie and dark trousers. She is carrying a brown bag. The doorway is brightly lit, creating a strong contrast with the dark room. There are other doorways visible in the background, but they are dark.

What about  
the next bit  
of the story?

In the next part both sons  
have grown up. Esau, his  
father's favourite, is an out  
-of-doors man - a hunter -  
whereas Jacob is a quiet  
lad and a mother's boy.

Gen 25. 27-28

Esau comes in from hunting one day absolutely famished to find Jacob cooking a delicious red stew.



He asks his brother if he can have some and Jacob readily assents but only in exchange for Esau's birthright.



Gen 25. 29-33



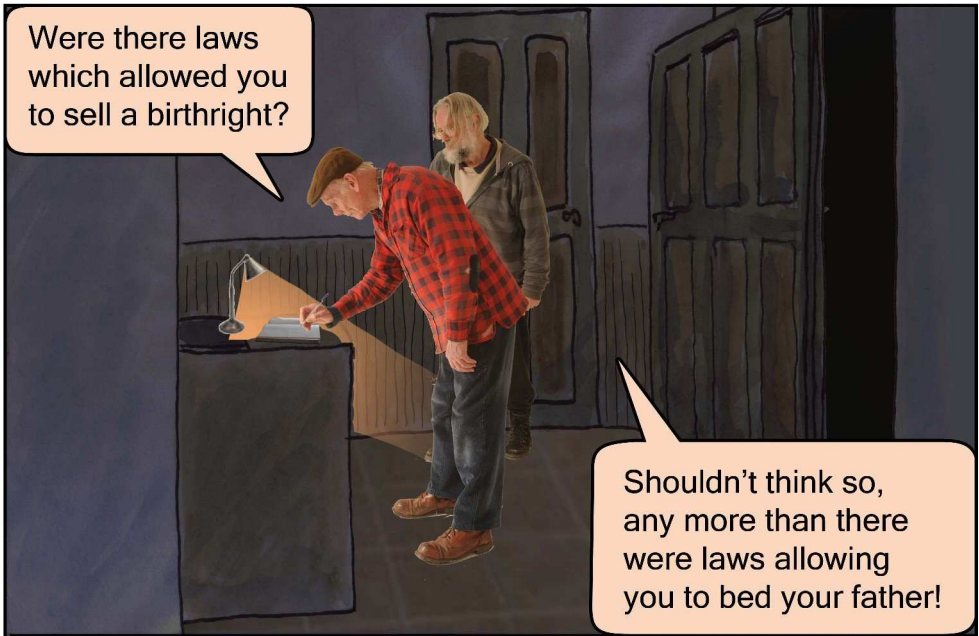
Seeing his present need as more important than some hypothetical future advantage, Esau agrees to the exchange, thankfully tucking into Jacob's reviving stew.



In this way, as the text says, 'Esau despised his birthright'... and Jacob revealed a highly ambitious nature, one might add.



Gen 25. 32-34



OK. So given that this is a representation what does it add to what we already know about Israel's relationship with Edom?



Well, clearly the story-teller is trying to explain why Israel rather than Edom became Yahweh's standard bearer.

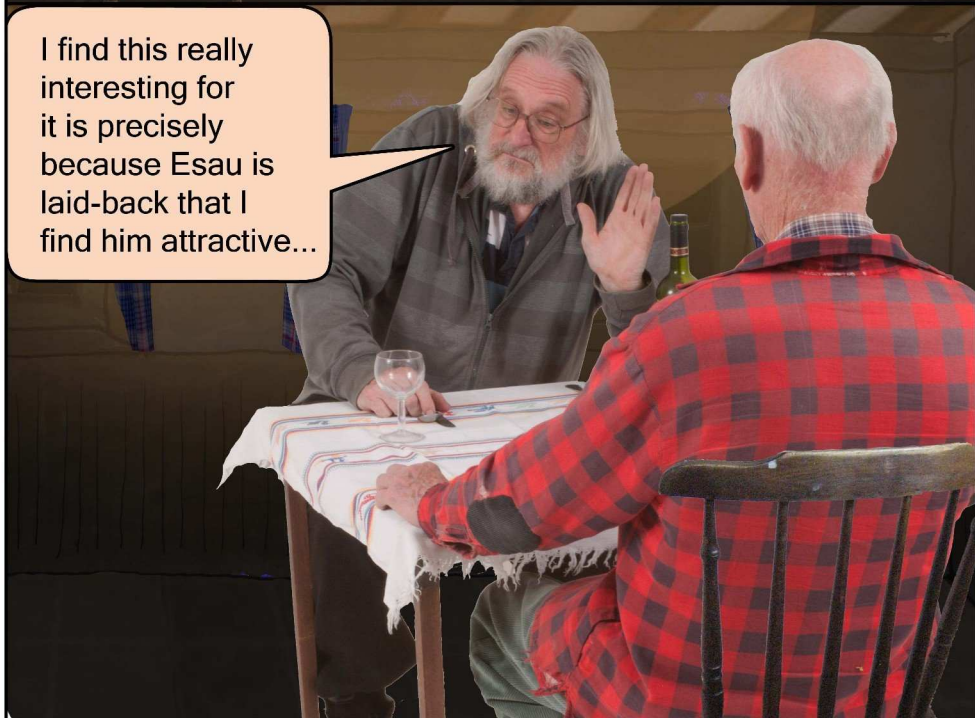




He maintains it was not an ideological matter, as in the case of Moab and Ammon, but rather something about Edom, as a community, being just too laid back.



I find this really interesting for it is precisely because Esau is laid-back that I find him attractive...





... much  
more  
attractive  
in fact  
than  
Jacob  
who  
I find  
distastefully  
pushy.



So what's the score? Why does the story  
-teller believe Yahweh favours pushyness?

I would have thought that was obvious.  
No one is going to be able to stand up  
to the collective hypocrisy of civilisation  
without being unbelievably pushy.



To stand up to the world's collective privilege-seeking and hypocrisy you need to be as pushy as a Stalin... without being violent, of course, as, unfortunately, Stalin was.



That's a dangerous comparison!



So it is but you have to run risks opening peoples' eyes.



For hundreds of years the authorities have found it convenient to dumb down the Bible by pretending it's a religious work; their objective being to hide the scary, marginal, political insights it contains.

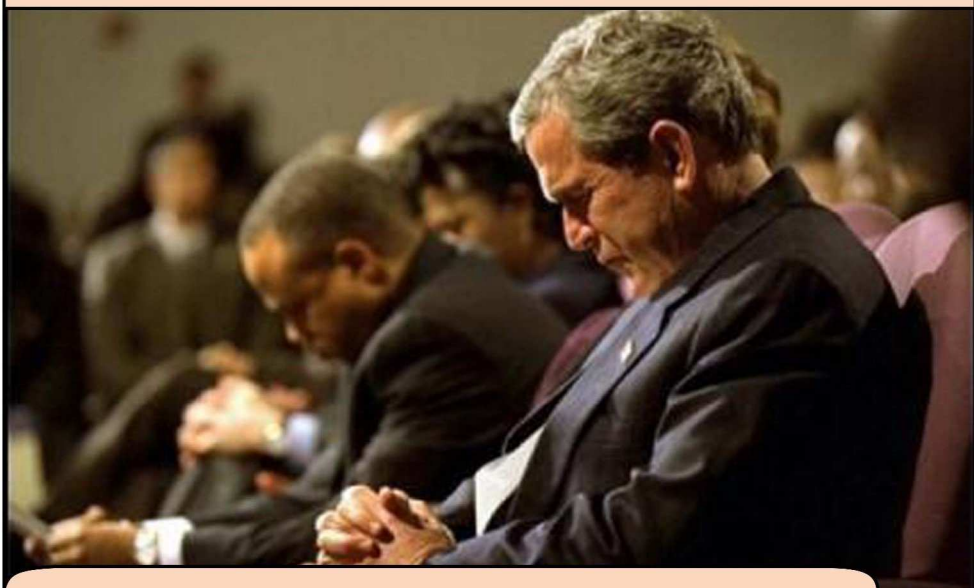


<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>

People have been happy to go along with this for, though they may not have had many privileges, they have had some, which they have not been prepared to share with those with none at all.



As a result they have not wanted to be reminded how shabby their attitude is, preferring to go along with their eyes tight shut like everyone else, the authorities included.



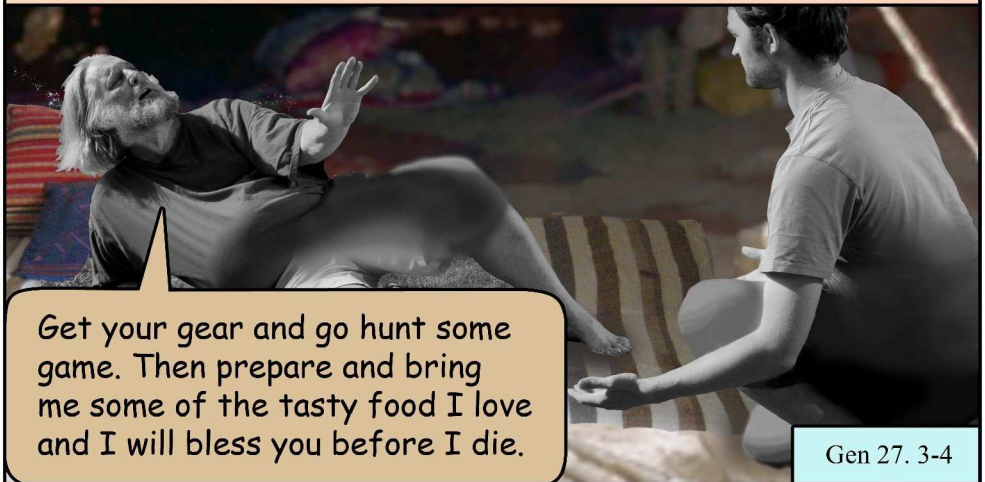
So if I now manage, with the aid of the Bible, to open their eyes it will inevitably be a shock to them, don't you think?

Perhaps we should continue the story!





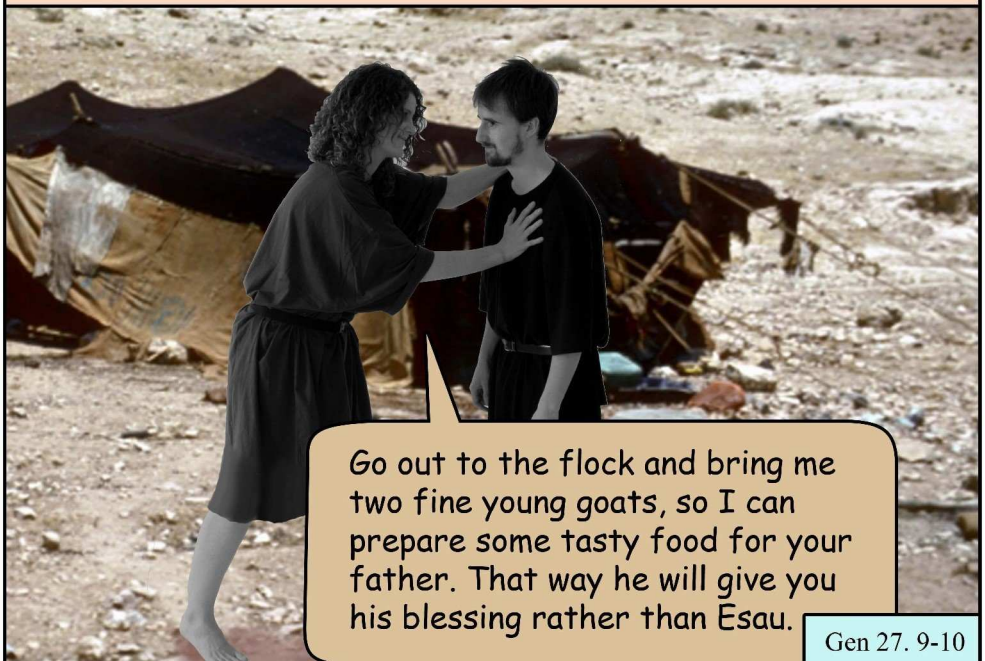
Isaac, now a blind old man, decides it's time to settle his affairs before he dies. So he calls his favourite first-born son Esau and gives him instructions:



Get your gear and go hunt some game. Then prepare and bring me some of the tasty food I love and I will bless you before I die.

Gen 27. 3-4

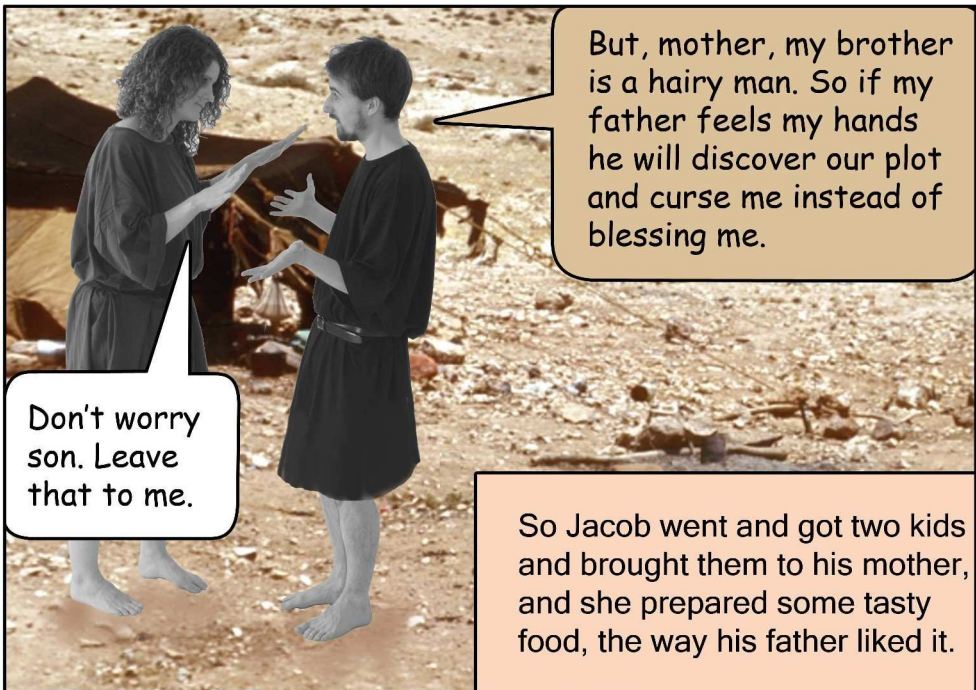
Rebekah, however, overhears this conversation and hurriedly tells her favourite son Jacob all about it.



Go out to the flock and bring me two fine young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father. That way he will give you his blessing rather than Esau.

Gen 27. 9-10





Rebekah then took Esau's best clothes, which were in the house, and Jacob put them on. She then covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins.

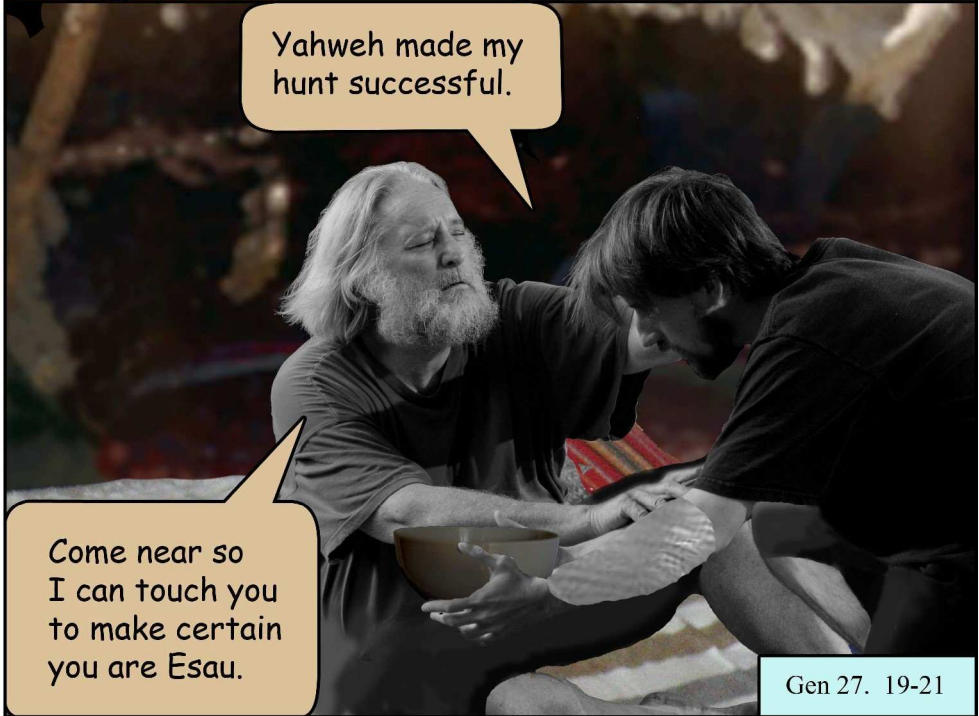


Finally she handed Jacob the food and told him to take it to his father.



Gen 27. 15-18



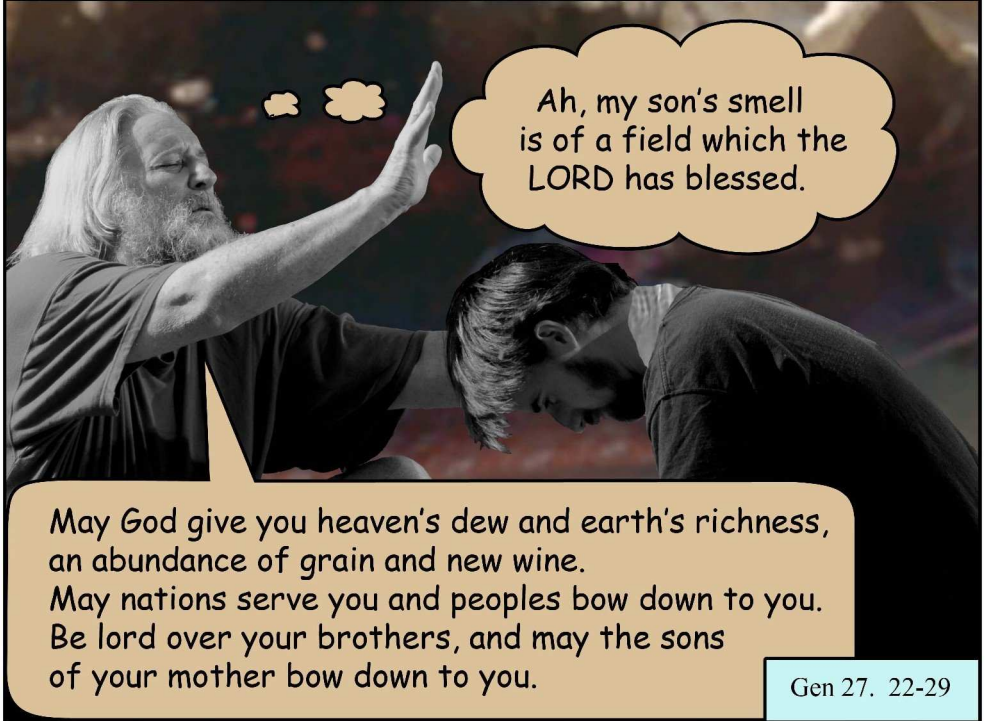






The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

Embrace me son!



Ah, my son's smell is of a field which the LORD has blessed.

May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness,  
an abundance of grain and new wine.  
May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.  
Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons  
of your mother bow down to you.

Gen 27. 22-29

Soon afterwards Esau came in from hunting. He too made his father some of his favourite food and brought it to him to eat.



Father sit up and eat some of this venison I have cooked for you so that you can bless me.

Isaac, of course is horrified.

Who was it that just brought me venison and received my blessing?



Gen 27. 30-33

When he heard this Esau cried out in anguish:


No! No! that can't be true. Father please, please bless me as well!

Son what can I do? Your brother came and craftily stole your blessing!

He is well named treacherous dog.\* That's the second time he has done me down. Can't you bless me as well?

\* The name Jacob means Supplanter



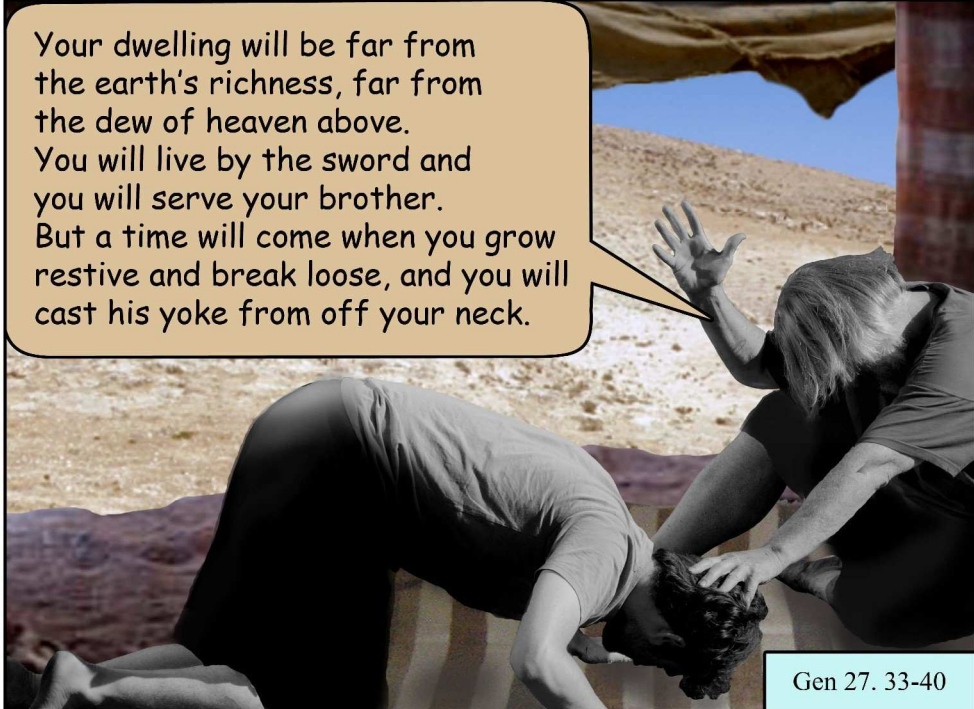


Son, I have made him your master. What can I do?

The scene is set in a desert with a tent in the background. An older man with a grey beard and a dark tunic is reclining on a striped rug. A younger man in a grey tunic is kneeling before him, gesturing with his hands as if pleading or explaining something.

Do you only have one blessing?  
For God's sake bless me as well!

Your dwelling will be far from  
the earth's richness, far from  
the dew of heaven above.  
You will live by the sword and  
you will serve your brother.  
But a time will come when you grow  
restive and break loose, and you will  
cast his yoke from off your neck.



The younger man is now bowing deeply in prayer, his head touching the ground. The older man is leaning over him, placing his hands on the younger man's head in a blessing gesture. The background shows the desert landscape and the tent.

Gen 27. 33-40

Because of what had happened Esau hated Jacob and he vowed to get his revenge after the days of mourning for his father were over.

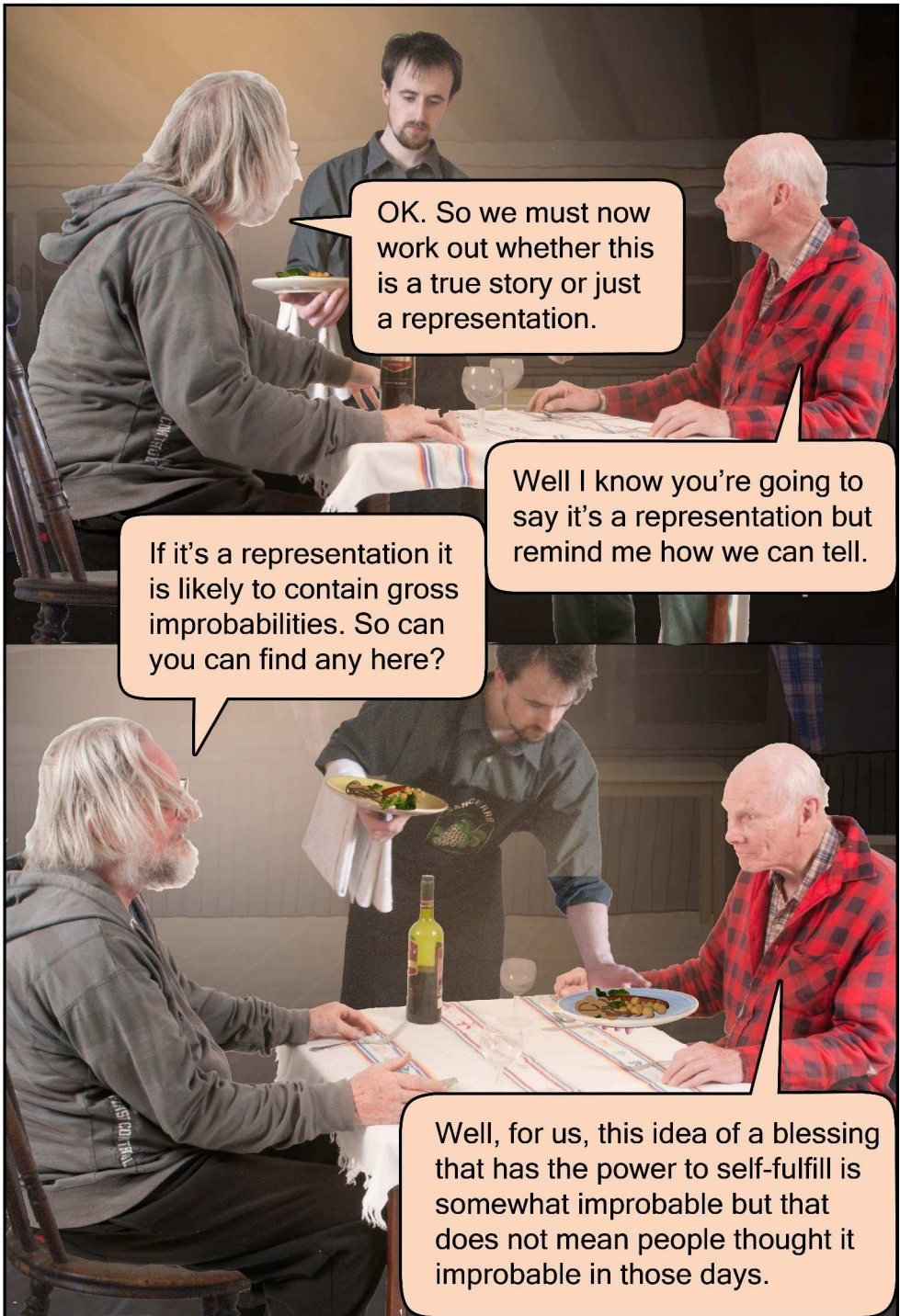


But Rebekah warned Jacob, telling him to flee to her brother Laban's house until Esau had got over being tricked for a second time by his brother.



Gen 27. 41-45





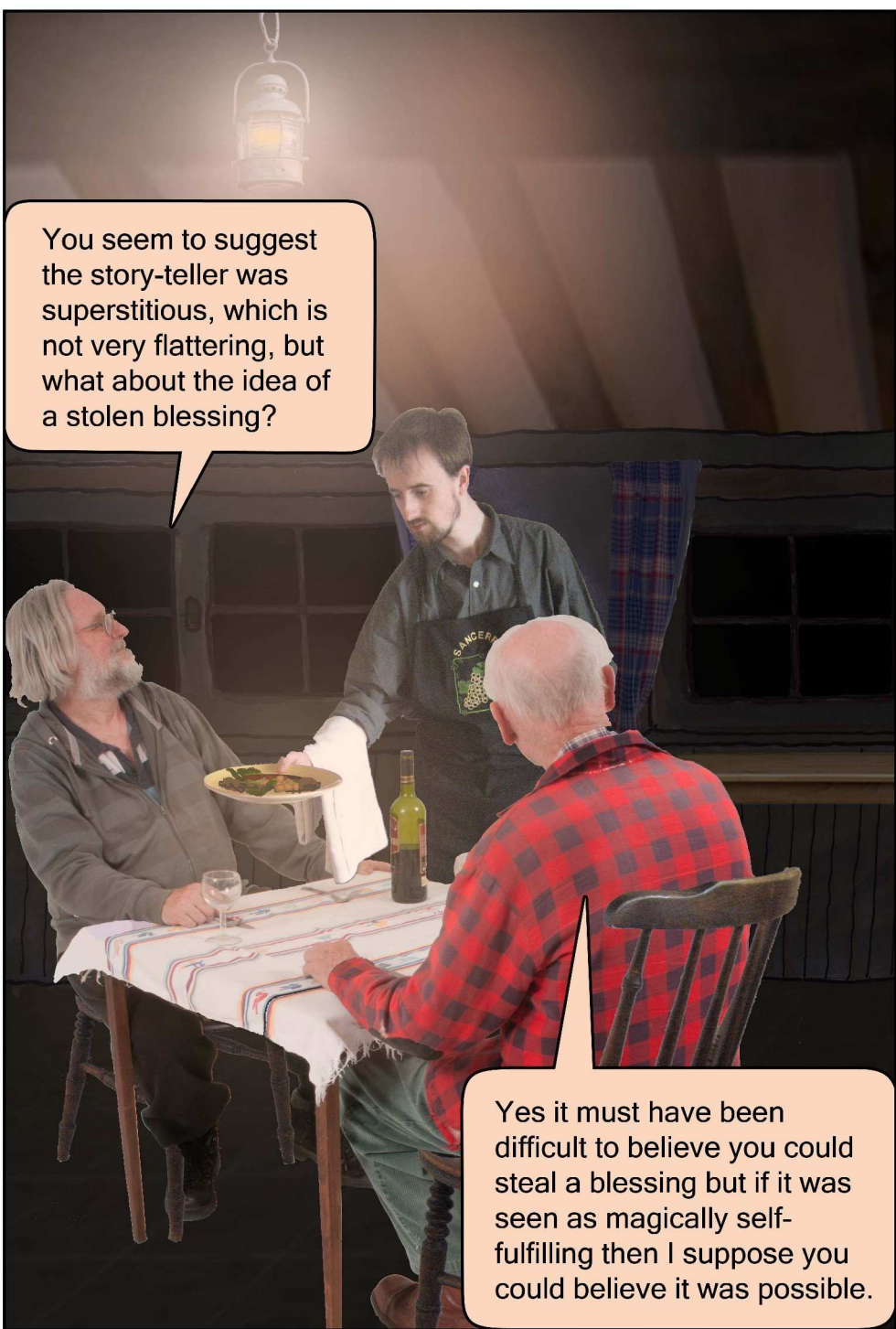
OK. So we must now work out whether this is a true story or just a representation.

Well I know you're going to say it's a representation but remind me how we can tell.

If it's a representation it is likely to contain gross improbabilities. So can you find any here?

Well, for us, this idea of a blessing that has the power to self-fulfill is somewhat improbable but that does not mean people thought it improbable in those days.



A man in a dark shirt and apron is standing and serving food on a plate to two men seated at a table. The man on the left has grey hair and a beard, wearing a grey jacket. The man on the right is older, with white hair, wearing a red and black plaid shirt. They are in a tent-like setting with a lantern hanging above them. The table has a white cloth with a colorful border and a bottle of olive oil.

You seem to suggest the story-teller was superstitious, which is not very flattering, but what about the idea of a stolen blessing?

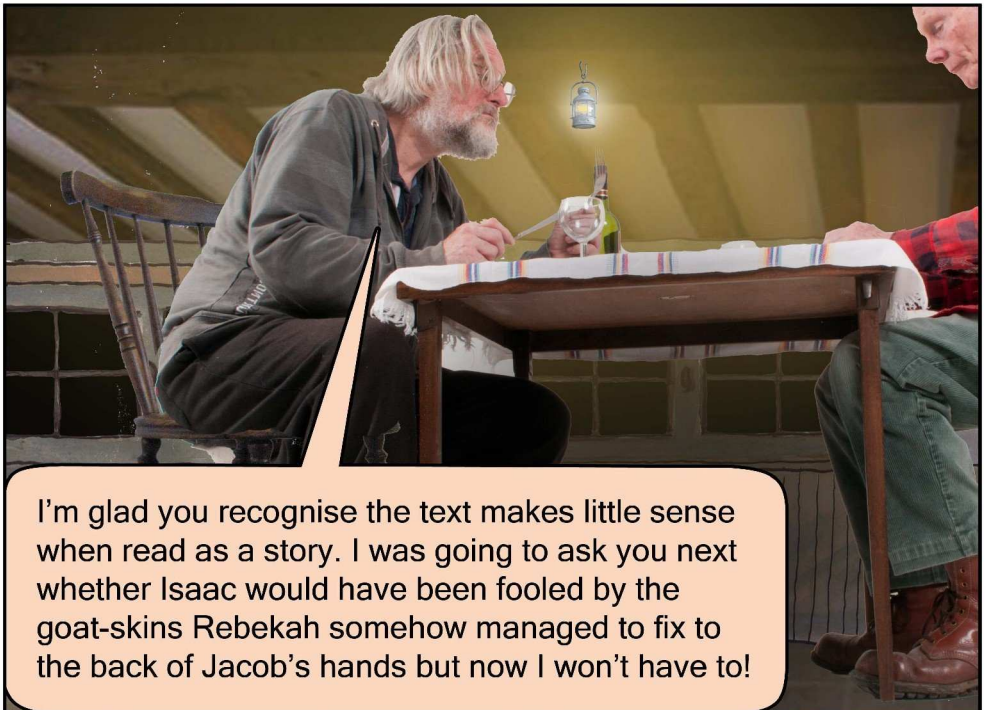
Yes it must have been difficult to believe you could steal a blessing but if it was seen as magically self-fulfilling then I suppose you could believe it was possible.

Your insinuation that the story-teller was a superstitious old fool gets more and more blatant! But tell me, if he did think you could steal a blessing do you think he believed Yahweh would let Jacob get away with it?



Yes, I see now that I have dug myself into a hole. For if this is a story, as I have always in the past believed, then either Yahweh countenanced the theft or else his hands were somehow tied by what had happened; and neither of these suppositions holds water. So perhaps you are right. Perhaps this is a representation after all.






I'm glad you recognise the text makes little sense when read as a story. I was going to ask you next whether Isaac would have been fooled by the goat-skins Rebekah somehow managed to fix to the back of Jacob's hands but now I won't have to!



No, as you say, when you consider it carefully, the whole thing's highly improbable

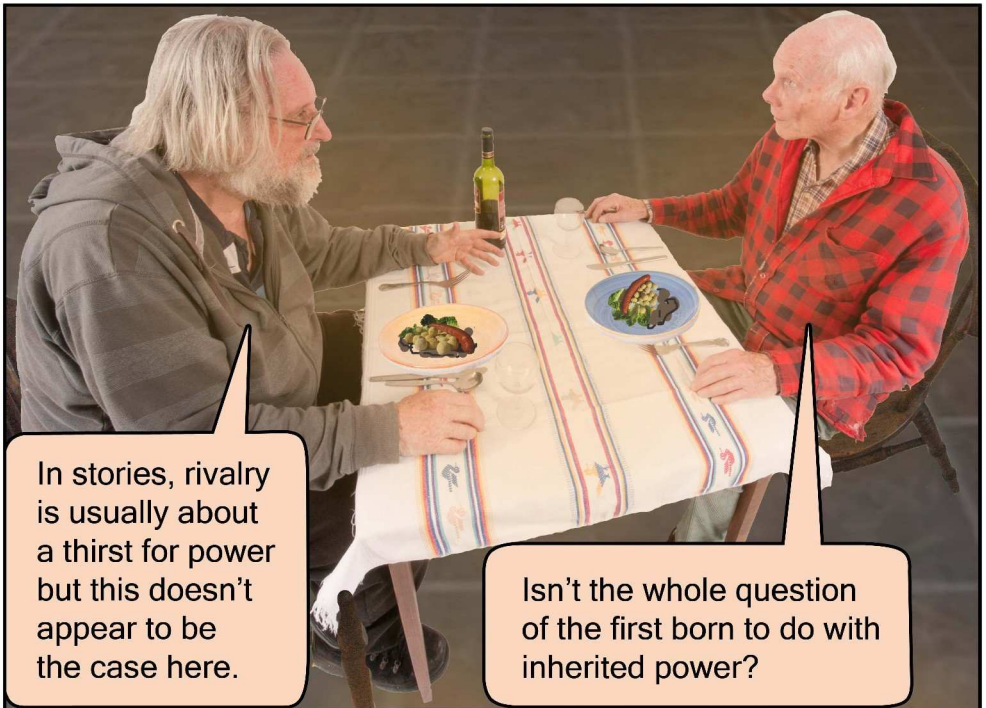
OK. So let's now see how things stand when we view the text as a god-of-the-marginals representation.





You say that as a representation the text affirms no ideological disagreement between Israel and Edom. But if that is so how do you explain the rivalry?

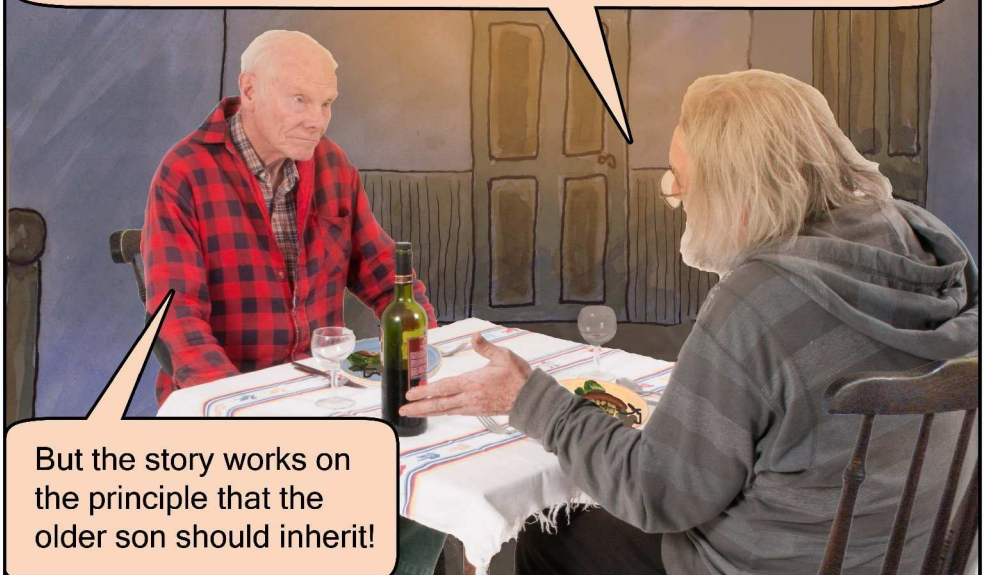
That's a good question. No one asks it as a rule because the text is taken to be a story and in stories rivalries are common and demand no explanation. However, in a representation you have to know what a rivalry represents, especially when it is so curiously one-sided.



In stories, rivalry is usually about a thirst for power but this doesn't appear to be the case here.

Isn't the whole question of the first born to do with inherited power?

Generally speaking, but not in this story where the inheritance is but a promise and the inheritor is the 'younger son', a title which, as we have already said, designates civilisation-losers.



But the story works on the principle that the older son should inherit!

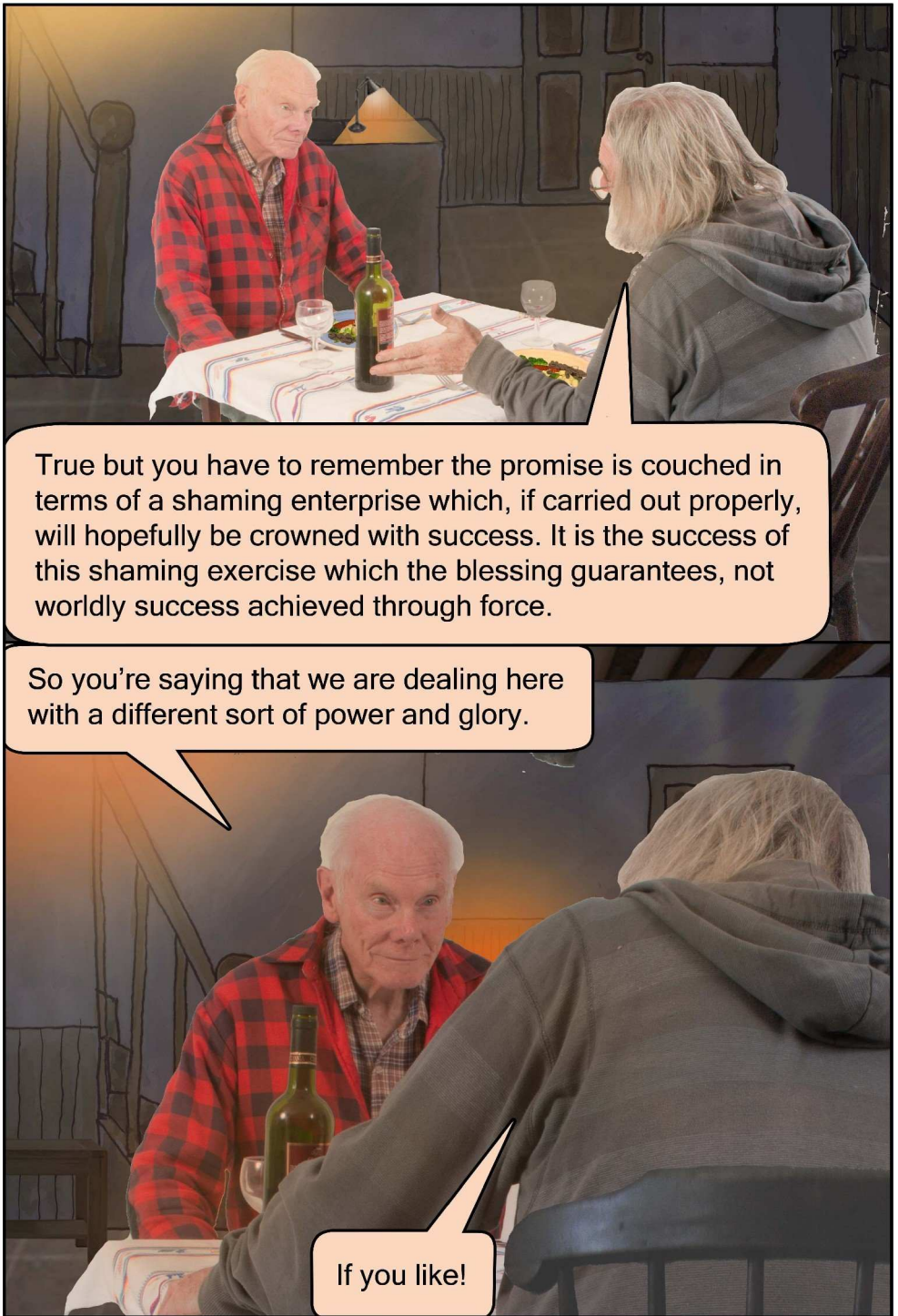




So it does but the story stands this civilisation principle on its head, making the first last and the last first.

Fair enough but the inheritance, when it comes, is still in the form of power and glory. For Jacob becomes rich and Esau is reduced to being his body guard!





True but you have to remember the promise is couched in terms of a shaming enterprise which, if carried out properly, will hopefully be crowned with success. It is the success of this shaming exercise which the blessing guarantees, not worldly success achieved through force.

So you're saying that we are dealing here with a different sort of power and glory.

If you like!



So why the rivalry?

Well, the rivalry has to do with who was to be Yahweh's true servant, destined to bring about his revolution. Consequently, on Jacob's side, it is the result of his overwhelming desire to gain this coveted position.



But why couldn't both brothers share the position as fellow revolutionaries?

Another good question and for us civilisation folk it is not easy to answer!









Indeed, when rivalry has broken surface in revolutionary movements it has usually had to do with ideological or strategic disagreement but, as we have said, there is nothing of that to be found here.



In fact, what we are presented with here is altogether strange: a revolutionary movement which, far from seeking brotherhood, finds it an embarrassment!

It seems to me that you are the one in a difficult position now. First you tell me that what we have here is a revolution ... but not one based on class-interests as has been the case with every other political revolution.



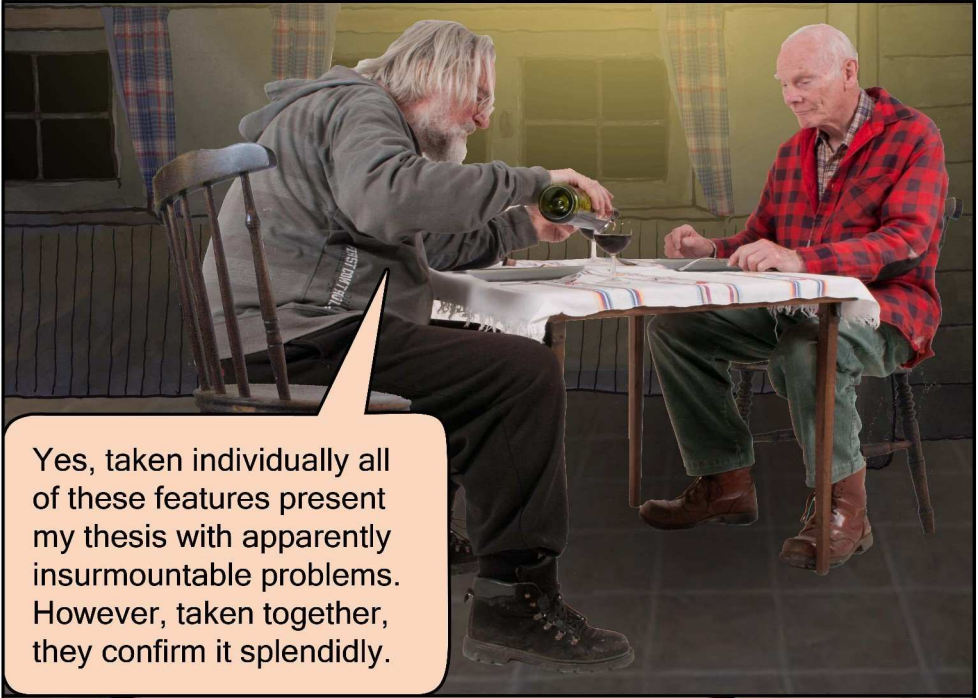
Next you tell me that this revolution, instead of working by force, works by shaming as no other political revolution has ever done.



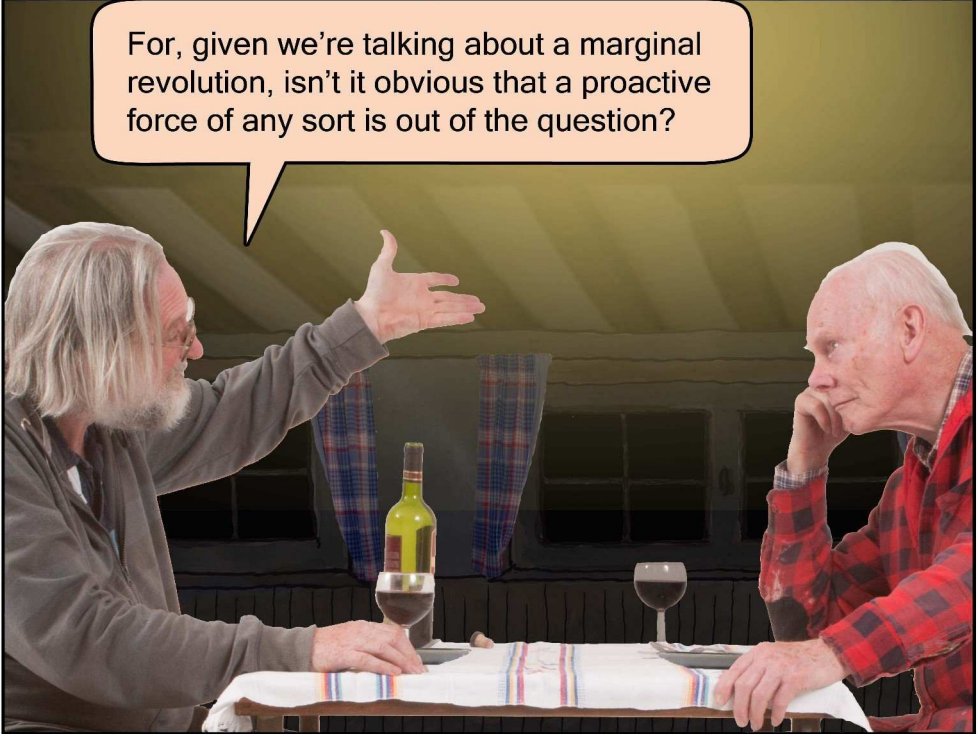
And now finally you tell me that this is a revolution in which social alliances - the strategic motor of all other political revolutions - are problematic!





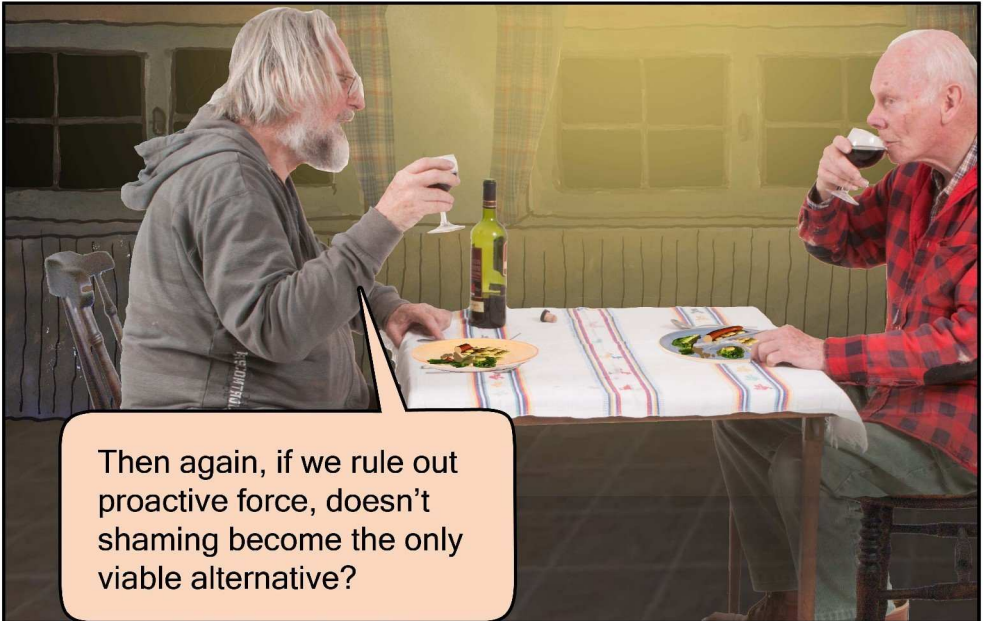


Yes, taken individually all of these features present my thesis with apparently insurmountable problems. However, taken together, they confirm it splendidly.

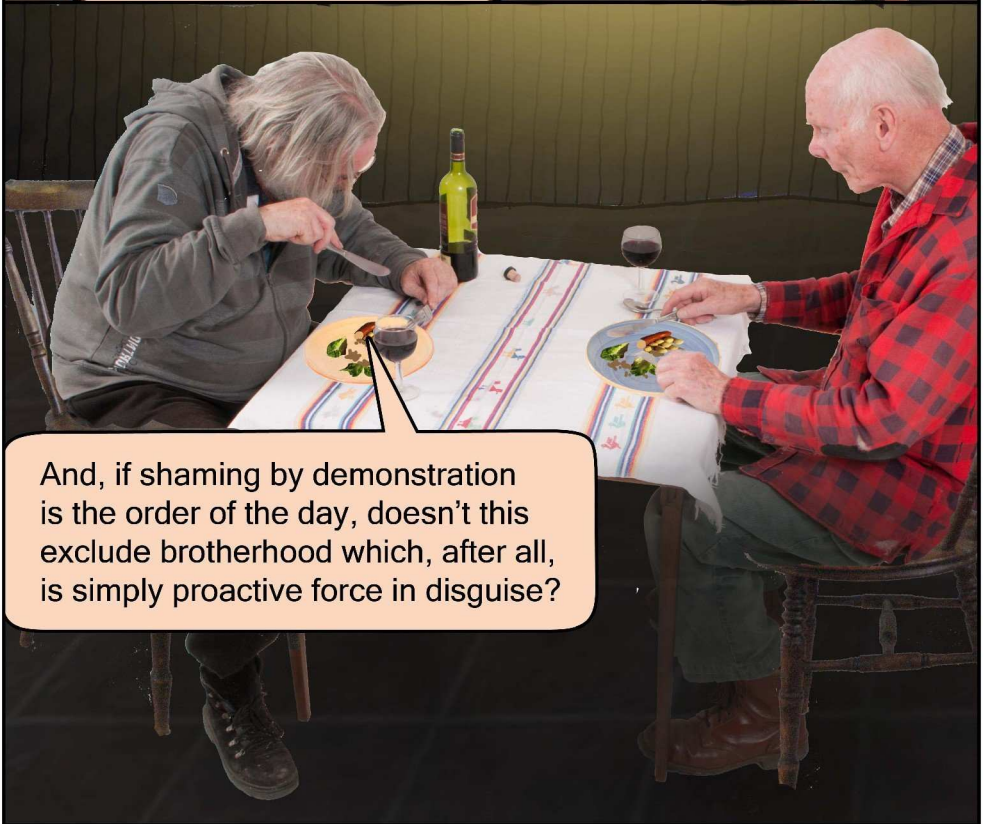


For, given we're talking about a marginal revolution, isn't it obvious that a proactive force of any sort is out of the question?





Then again, if we rule out proactive force, doesn't shaming become the only viable alternative?



And, if shaming by demonstration is the order of the day, doesn't this exclude brotherhood which, after all, is simply proactive force in disguise?



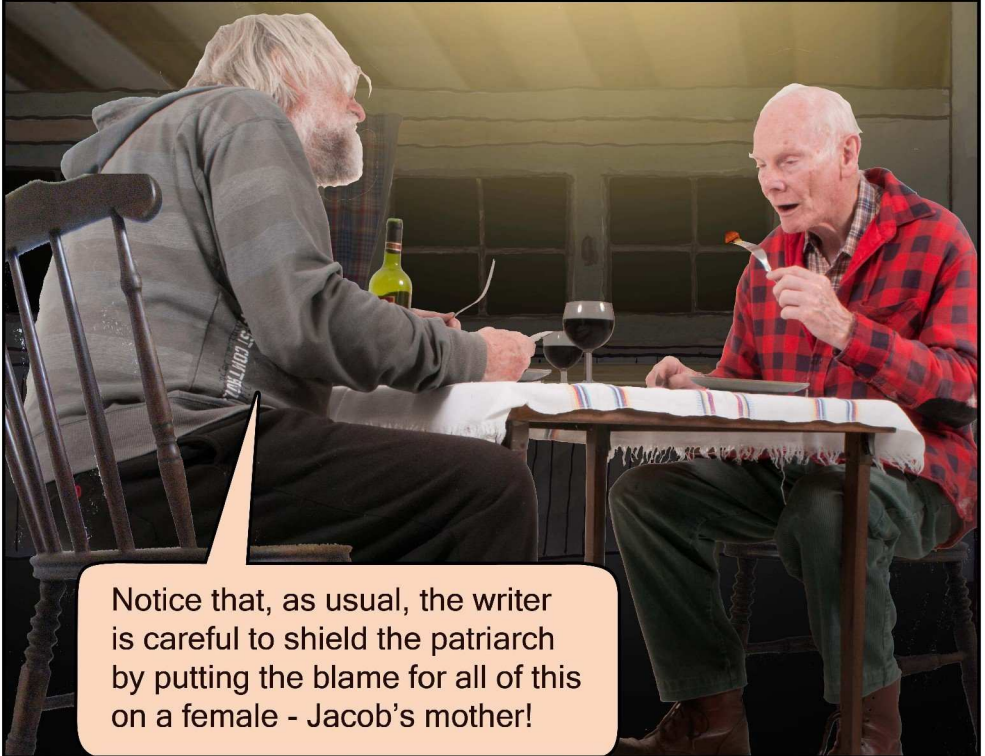
OK so what's  
the story saying?

It's saying that Israel was consumed by a passionate desire to be the god of the marginals' true servant. However, embarrassingly, she found this put her in competition with her brother community, Edom since only one of them could put on the demonstration which would draw the attention of the Gentile world.



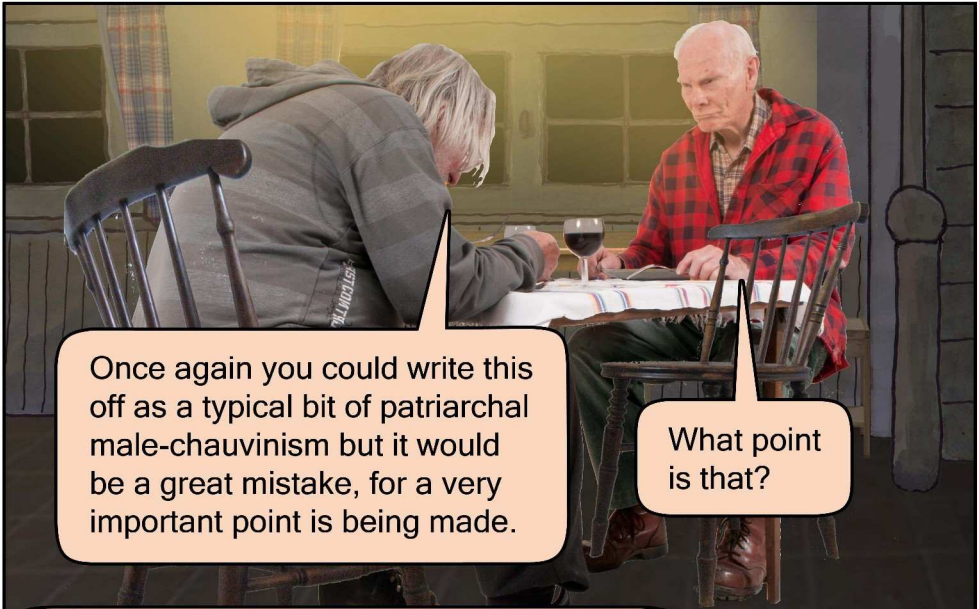


This situation made her feel very guilty since she could only realise her dream by robbing the Edomites of theirs.



Notice that, as usual, the writer is careful to shield the patriarch by putting the blame for all of this on a female - Jacob's mother!





Once again you could write this off as a typical bit of patriarchal male-chauvinism but it would be a great mistake, for a very important point is being made.

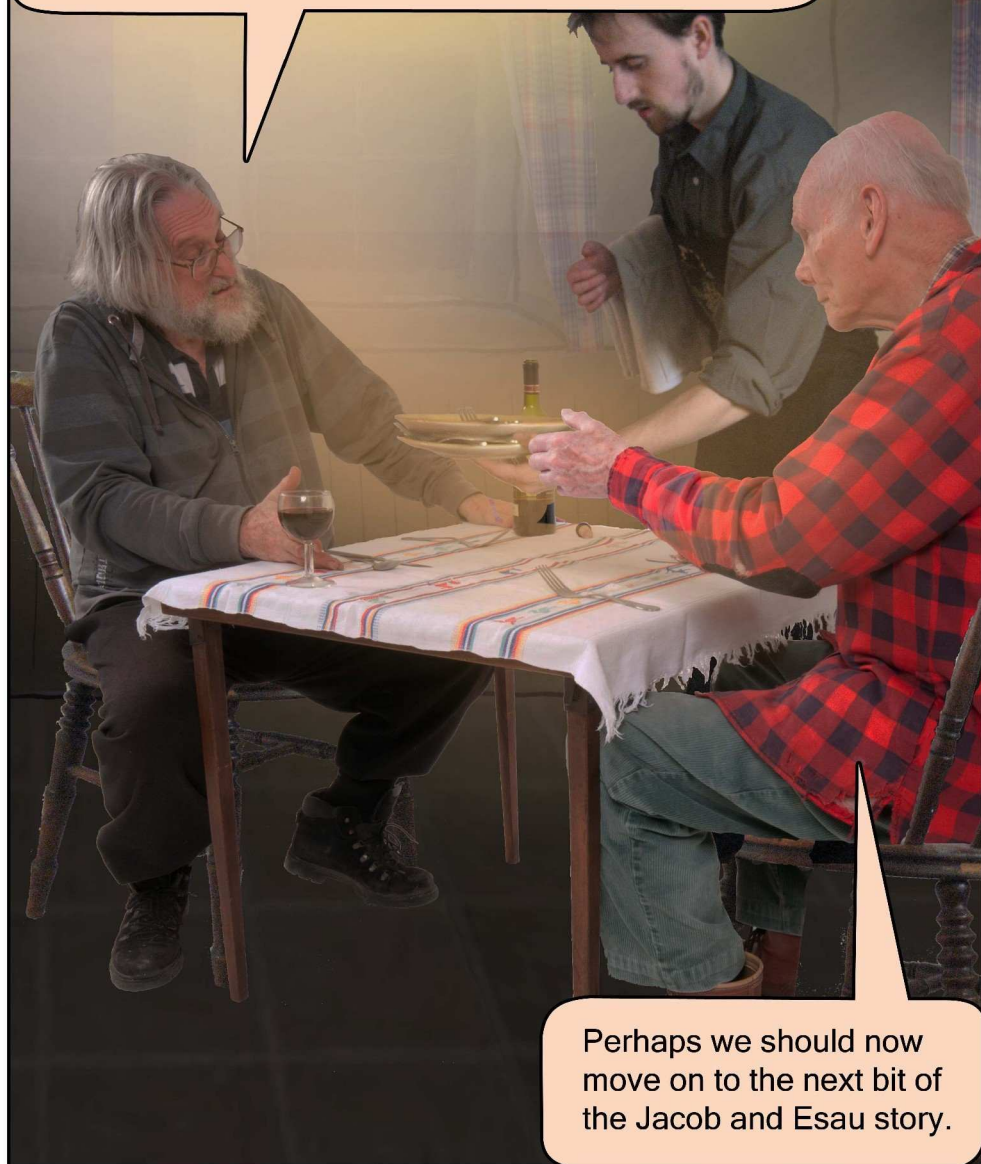
What point is that?

That even though Israel is consumed by guilt she's not really responsible for Edom's unhappy situation which stems solely from Israel's laudable desire to be the god of the marginals' standard-bearer.



Fair enough!

So there you have it. Read in the normal manner, as a religious story, this text makes little sense being full of improbabilities and unanswerable questions. However, read politically, as a representation, every bit of it makes the best of sense and I know of no other way of achieving this objective.



Perhaps we should now move on to the next bit of the Jacob and Esau story.





# 9

## Jacob and Laban





Jacob left his home in Canaan and travelled east to his uncle's house in Haran where he fell in love with his cousin Rachel.





Jacob offered to work for his uncle Laban for seven years if he would then give him Rachel's hand in marriage.



Laban readily agreed but he tricked Jacob for when the time came he gave him Leah, Rachel's older sister, instead as a bride.

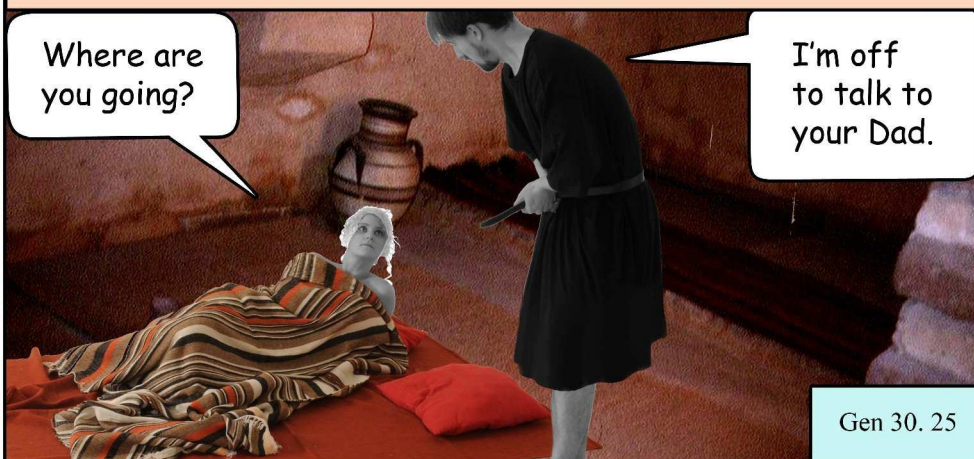


Gen 29. 23

So Jacob had to work for his uncle seven more years. Finally, having at last achieved his goal by marrying Rachel, he decided to tell Laban he wanted to return home with his family.

Where are you going?

I'm off to talk to your Dad.



Gen 30. 25

But, because of his acquired skills, Jacob had become a great asset to Laban who was loathe therefore to let him go.

Aren't you happy here with us?  
I will be glad to let you name your own wages If you agree to remain.



Gen 30. 27 - 28



Jacob agreed to stay but he didn't want wages.

If I stay I want half of the profit I make, the other half being yours.

It's a deal!

However, aware that his own propensity for success was likely to arouse jealousy, Jacob was determined to find a clear way of distinguishing what was his from what belonged to his uncle.

What are you up to now?

I'm trying to think of a foolproof way to distinguish between my animals and those belonging to your Dad.



He suggested to Laban that all the animals born into his flock with black marks he himself should keep, his uncle having all of the pure white stock.

Gen 30. 32 - 33



Once again Laban was happy to agree. However, in handing over to Jacob his designated flock he slyly included only animals with no trace of black in their coats.

Gen 30. 34 - 36



But this did not hamper Jacob for he too had a genetic trick up his sleeve.

Gen 30. 37 - 42







As a result of this exchange of underhand dealings, the very situation Jacob had dreaded and tried so hard to avoid came about, with Laban becoming terribly jealous.


Gen 31. 1- 2





Realising this, Jacob decided that now he simply had to return home with his family.


Gen 31. 3 - 13



Pack your things.  
We must leave  
as soon as we can.

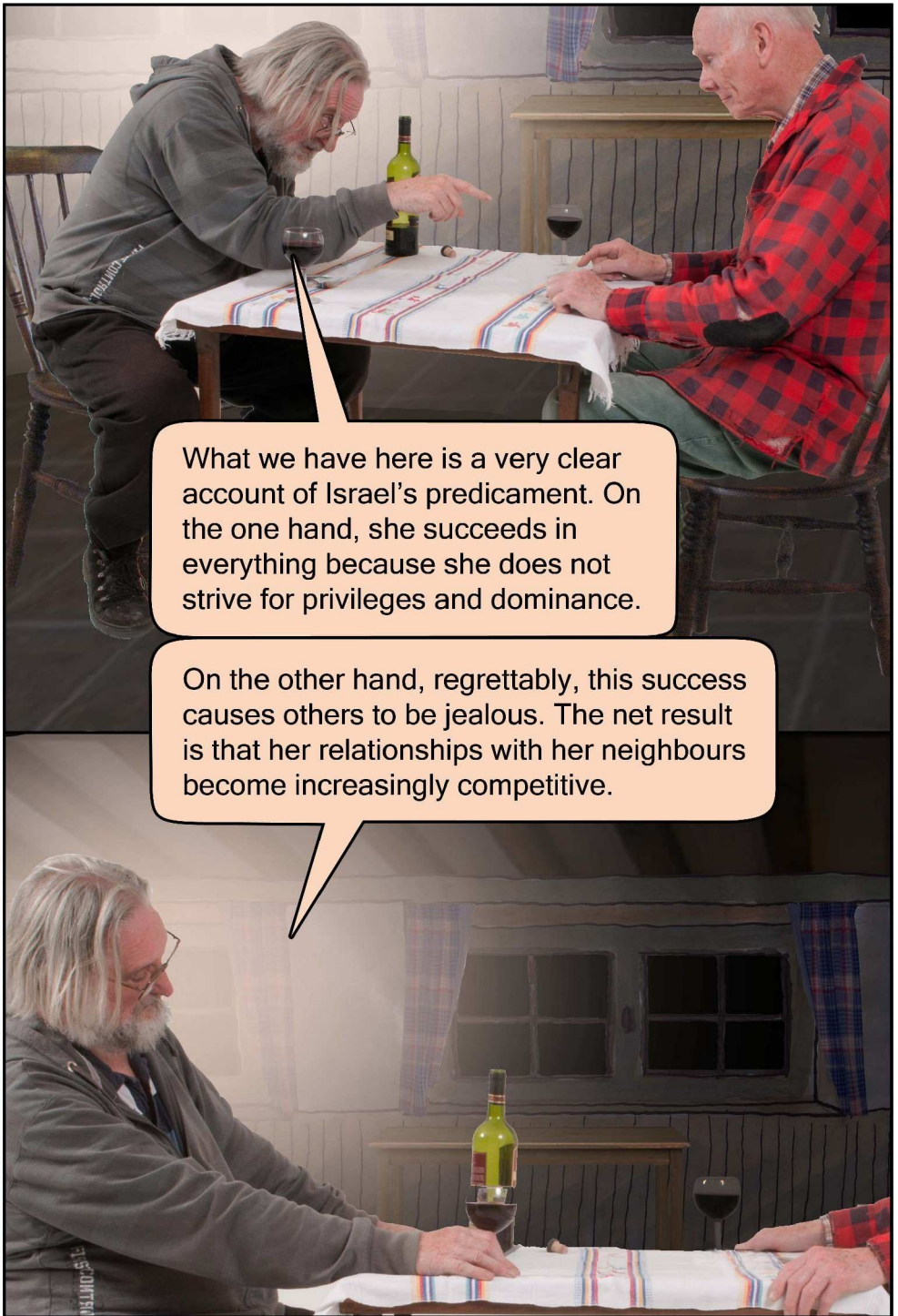
The story continues with a long and involved account of the difficulties caused by Laban's jealousy because he saw Jacob as grabbing everything precious.

Gen 31. 14 - 54

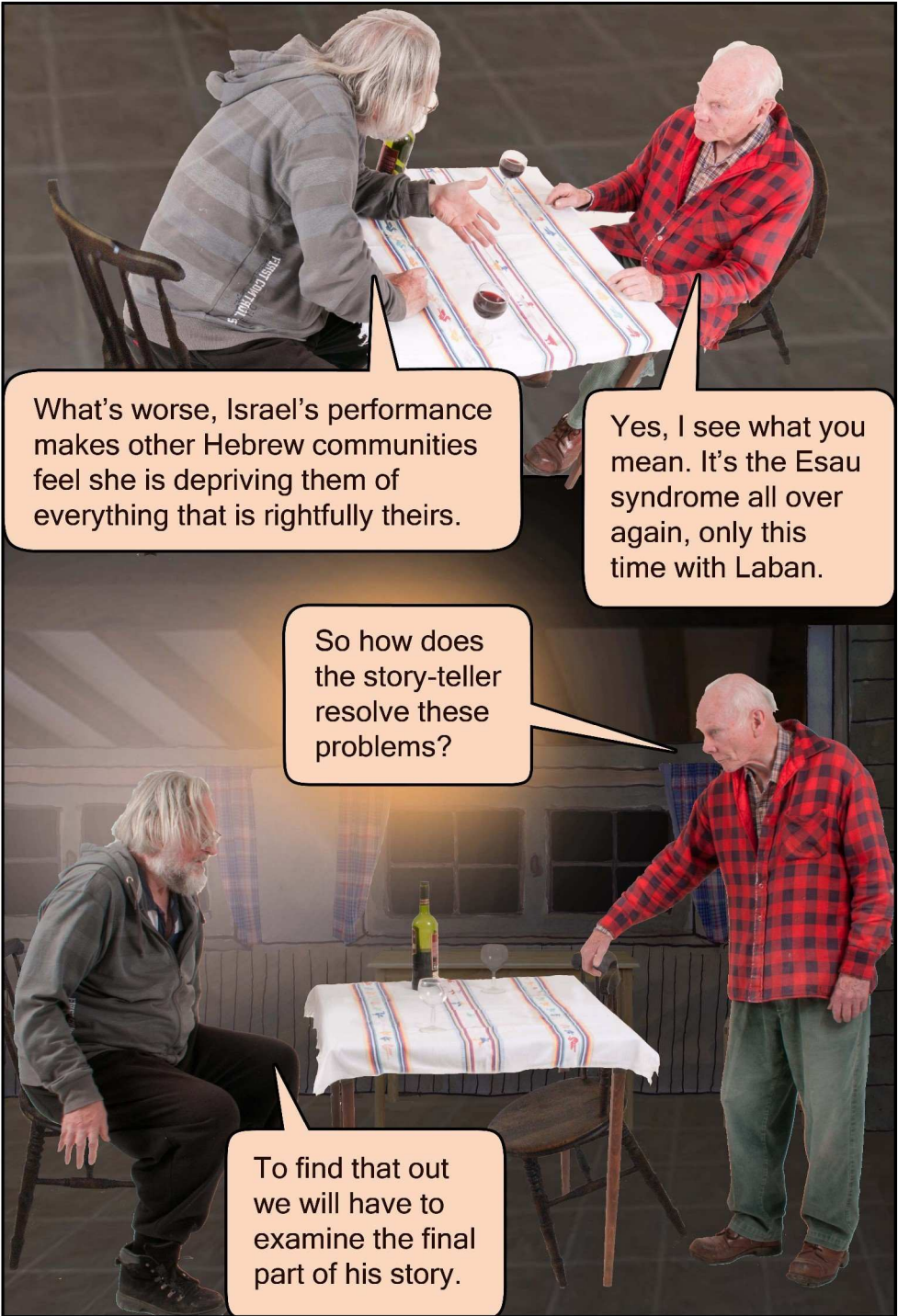


What are you  
looking for?

The family gods.  
Your father can't  
find them.







What's worse, Israel's performance makes other Hebrew communities feel she is depriving them of everything that is rightfully theirs.

Yes, I see what you mean. It's the Esau syndrome all over again, only this time with Laban.

So how does the story-teller resolve these problems?

To find that out we will have to examine the final part of his story.



# 10

## Jacob's Problem with Esau Resolved



Jacob is on his way home but he is scared his brother Esau may still be angry with him. So he sends a messenger ahead to find out.

Gen 32. 3 - 5

Say to my brother that I am his humble servant. Tell him I have been living with uncle Laban and have done well for myself. Find out if I am in his good books and whether he is willing to see me.



Later

What did he say?

He's coming to meet you with 400 men.

Oh my God!

Gen 33. 1





Jacob is so frightened he divides his family into two groups so that if Esau massacres one of them the other half of the family will have a chance to escape.

Gen 32. 7



He then gets his herdsmen to create three big droves containing a variety of animals, as presents for his brother.

Gen 32. 13 - 18

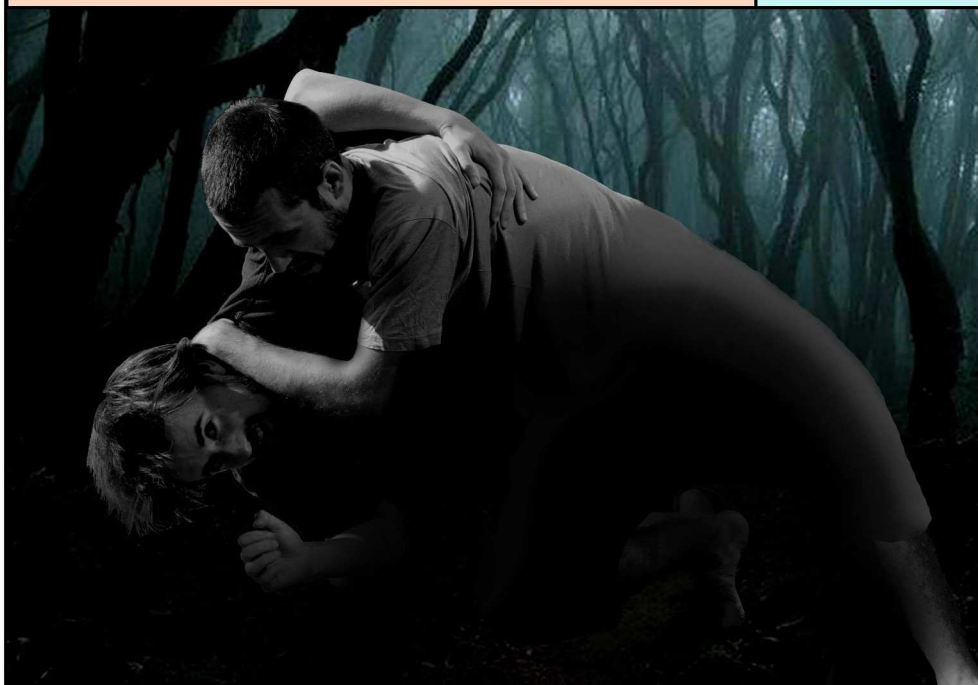


As evening fell they came to the river Jabbok. Jacob saw everyone across the ford, he alone not crossing.

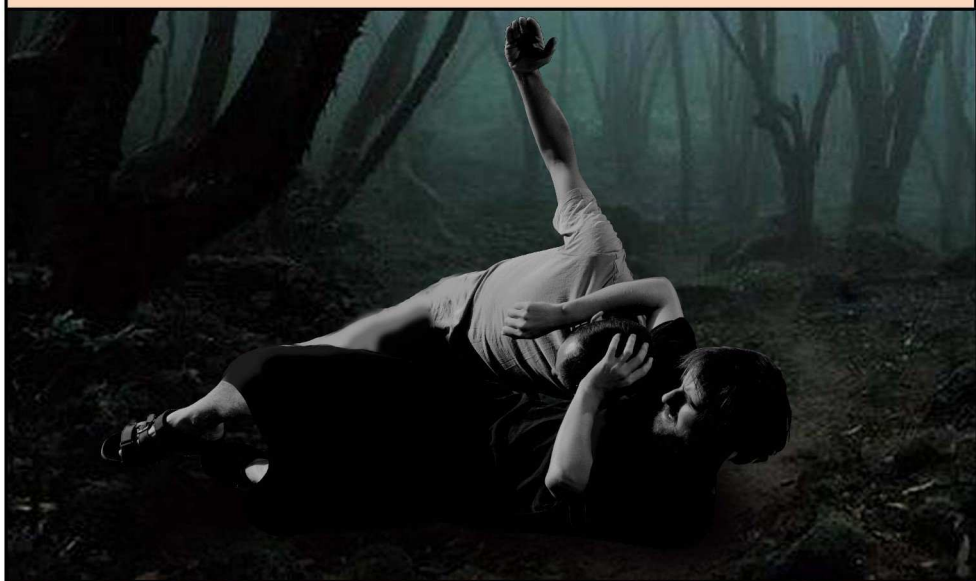


The story recounts that during that night Jacob wrestled with a man right up until daybreak...

Gen 32. 22 - 24



However, seeing that he did not prevail, the man eventually broke Jacob's hold by dislocating his thigh.



Let me go, for  
it is daybreak.

I will only let  
you go if you  
bless me.





What is  
your name?

Jacob

Your name will  
no longer be  
Jacob, but  
Israel,\*  
because you  
have struggled  
with God and  
with man and  
have overcome.

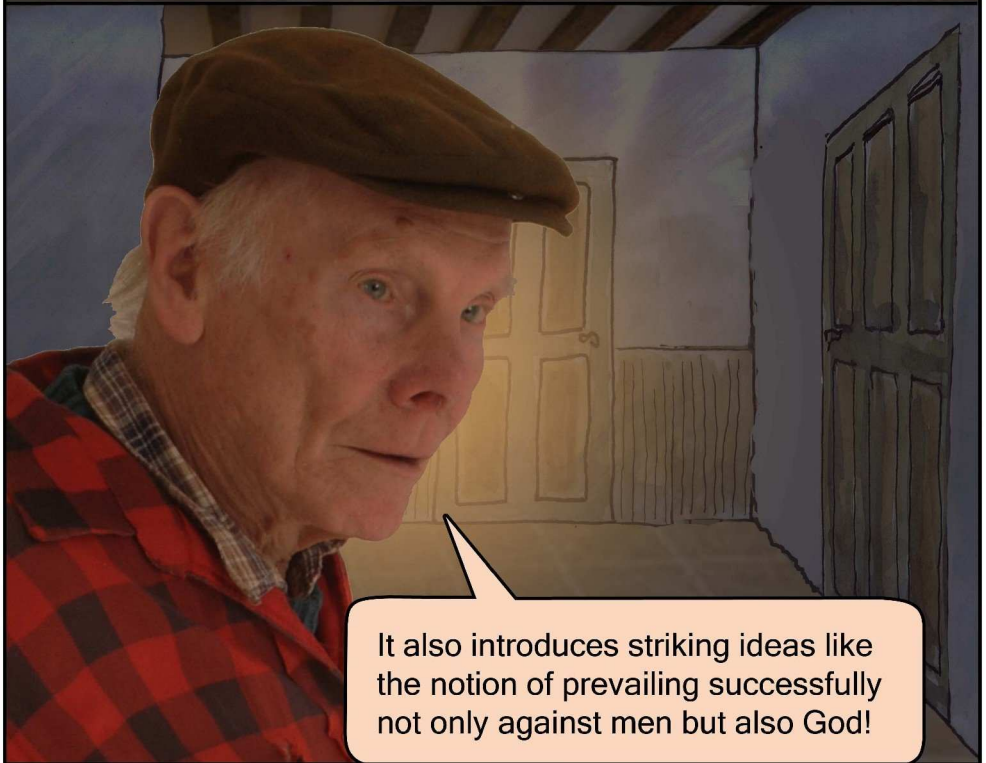
\*Meaning: He who  
strives with God

Jacob asked the man his name but he would not give it. However, he did give Jacob his blessing.

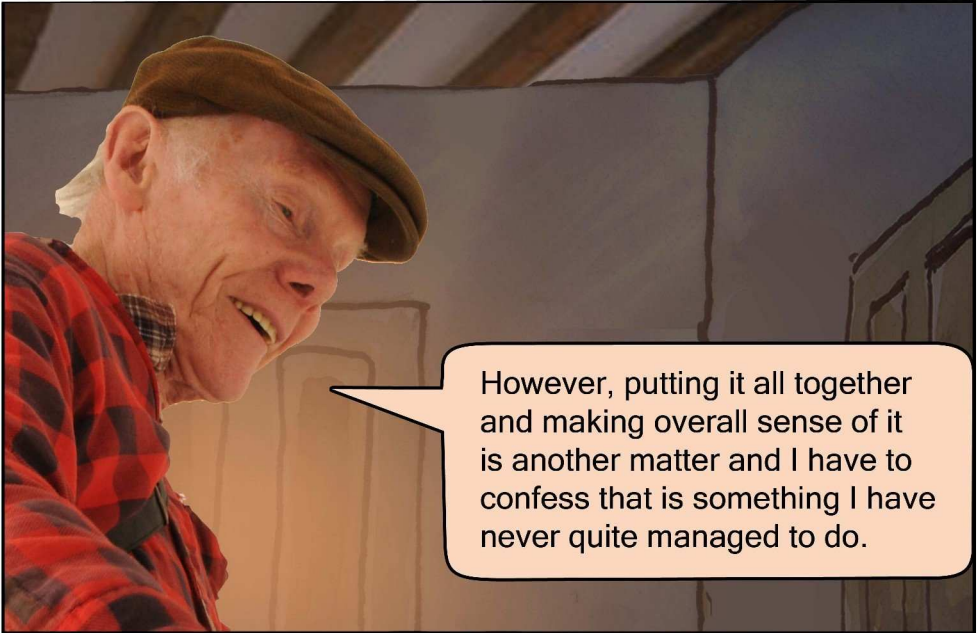


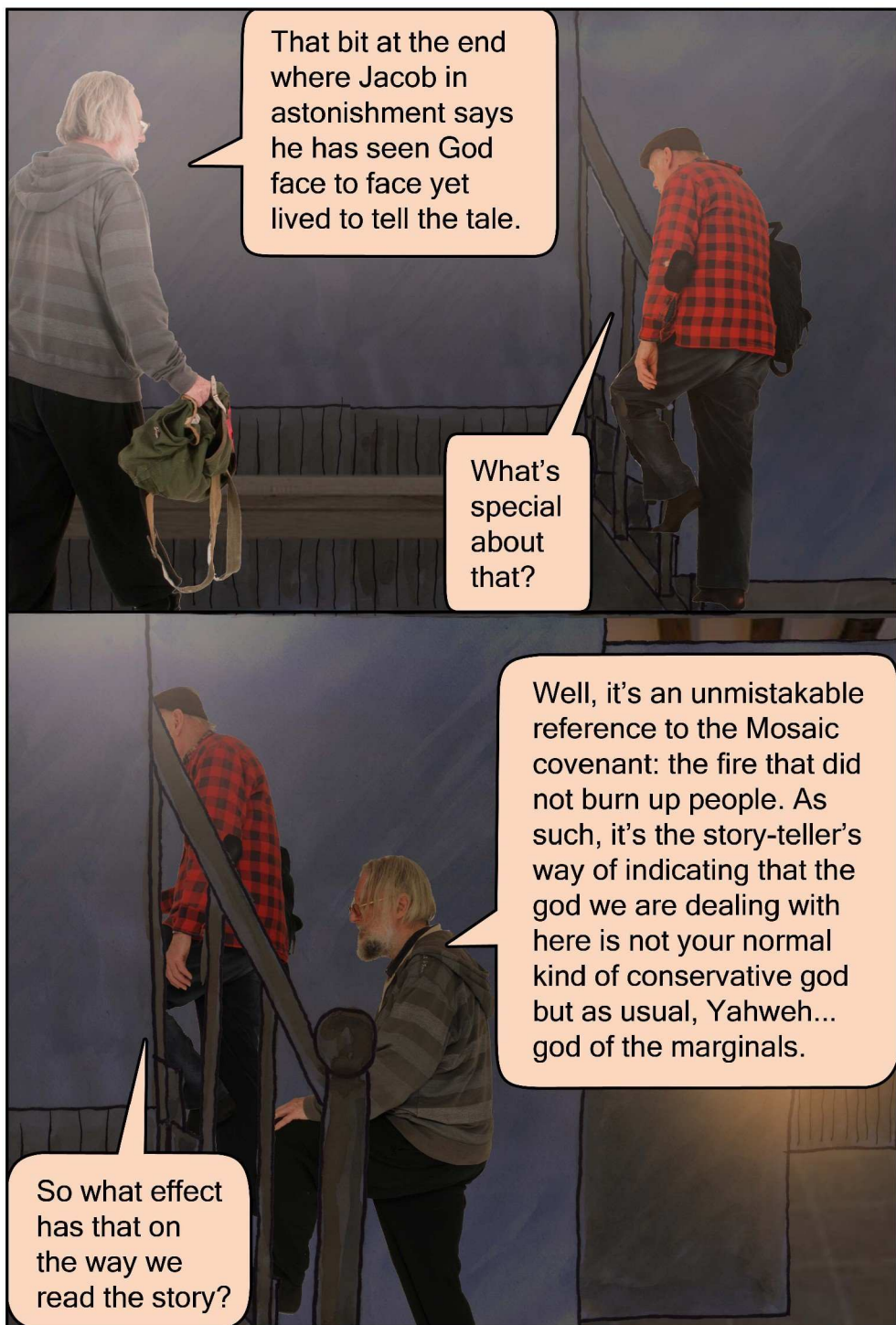
So Jacob called the place Peniel, meaning 'God's face', for, as he said, 'I saw God face to face but did not die!'

Gen 32. 31





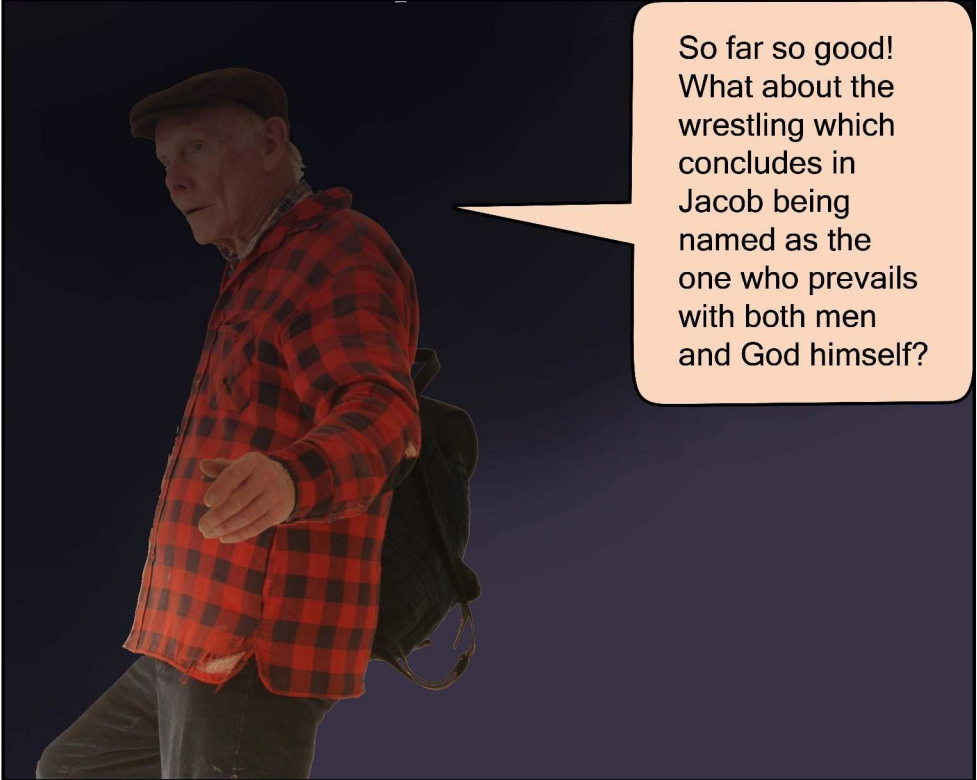




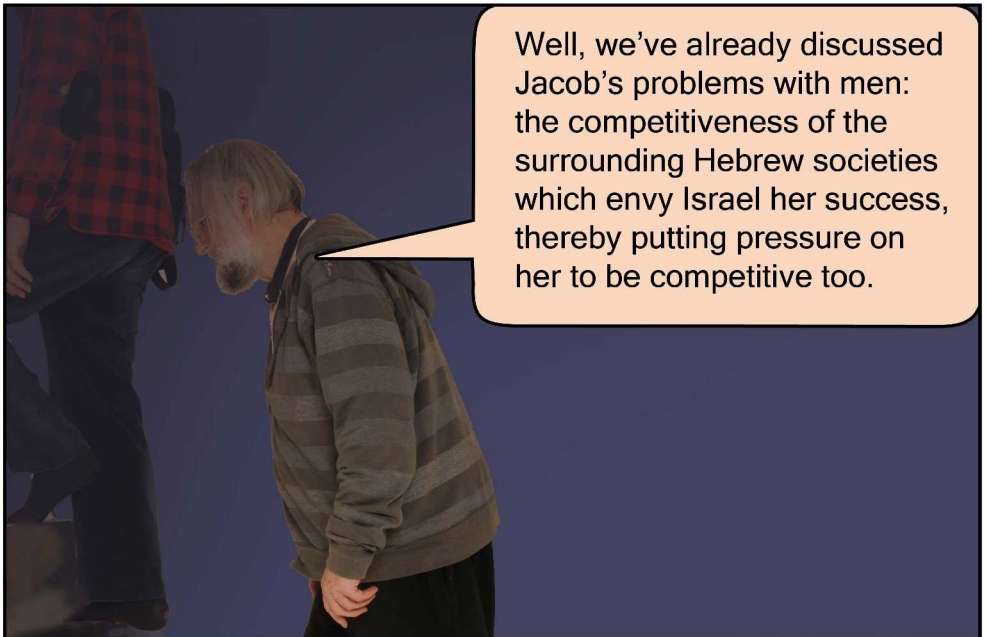
Well, let's take it gently.  
The crossing of the river  
tells us we are about to  
deal with a completely  
new situation... and the  
change in name tells us  
that this new situation will  
be brought about by an  
important change in  
Jacob's character.



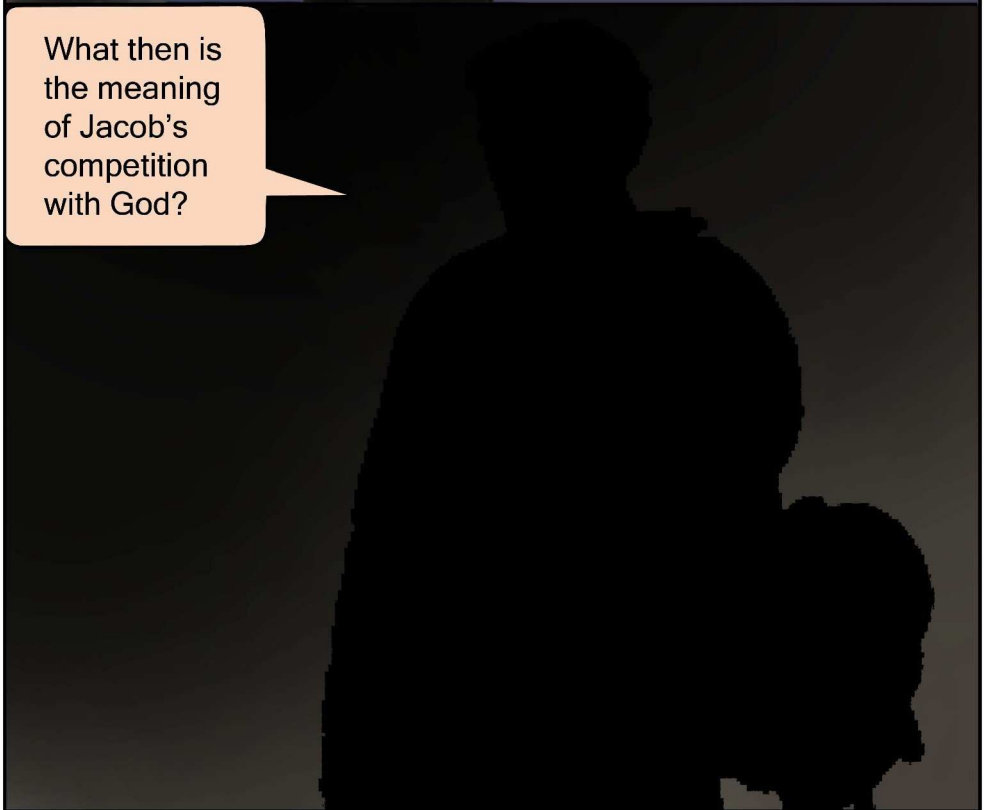
So far so good!  
What about the  
wrestling which  
concludes in  
Jacob being  
named as the  
one who prevails  
with both men  
and God himself?



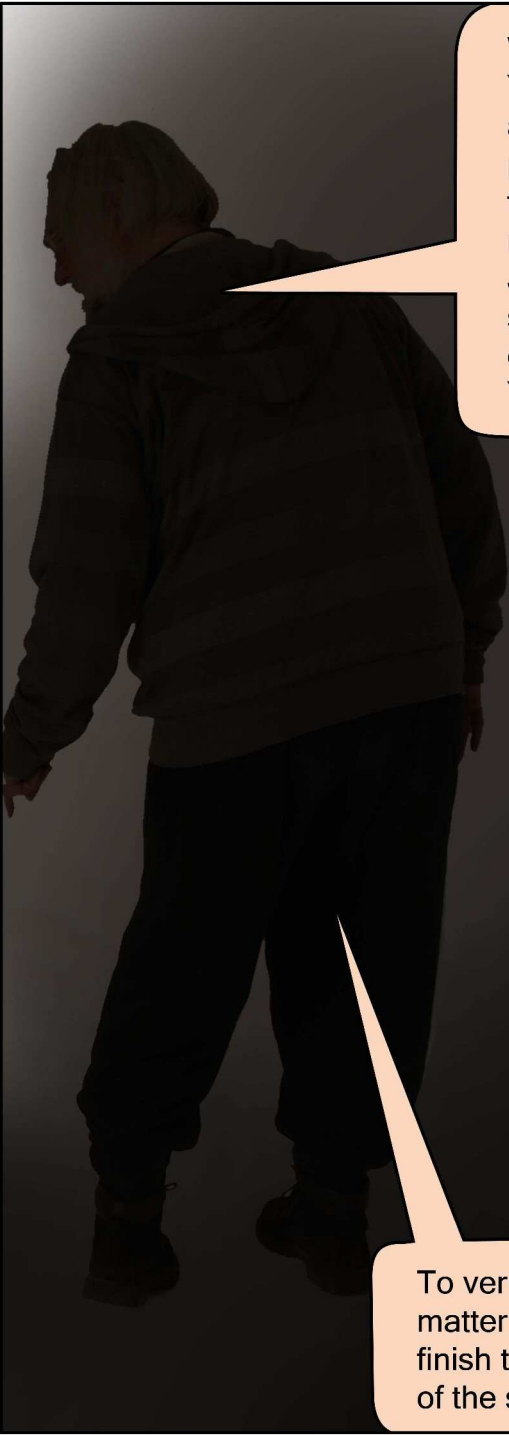




Well, we've already discussed Jacob's problems with men: the competitiveness of the surrounding Hebrew societies which envy Israel her success, thereby putting pressure on her to be competitive too.



What then is the meaning of Jacob's competition with God?

A person wearing a dark, quilted jacket and dark pants is walking away from the viewer in a dark, hazy environment. The person is slightly out of focus, and their shadow is cast on the ground. Two speech bubbles are overlaid on the image: one in the upper right and one in the lower center.

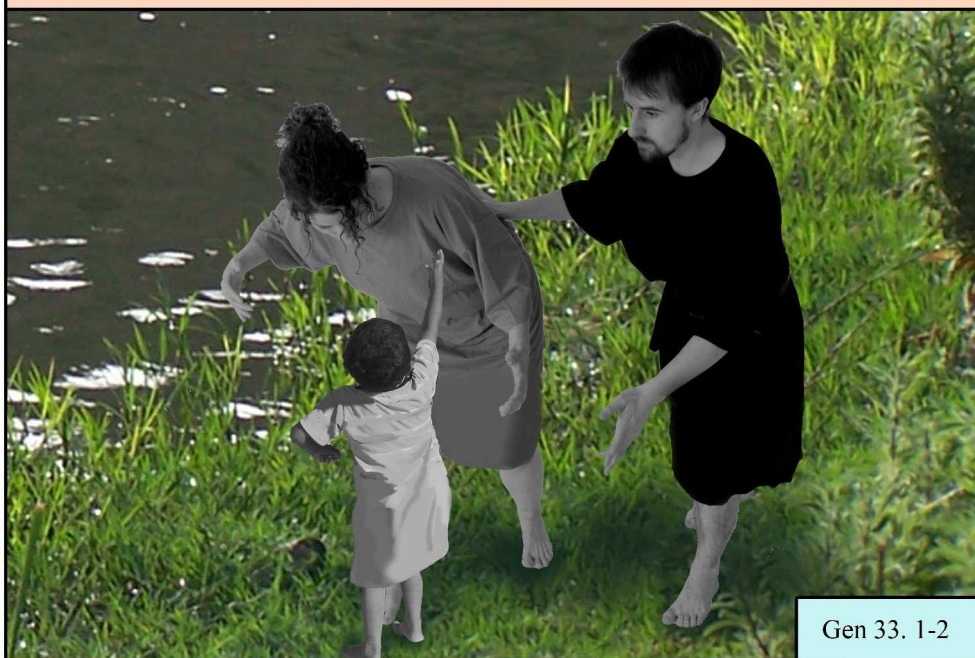
Well, given that God is here  
Yahweh, god of the marginals,  
and given that Jacob wishes  
passionately to become his  
faithful servant, it stands to  
reason the striving must be  
Jacob's attempt to do the job  
so well as to finally do it  
correctly... thus making him  
Yahweh's equal.

To verify the  
matter we must  
finish the rest  
of the story.

Crossing the river, now limping because of his thigh, Jacob sees his brother approaching with a whole host of men.



Terrified, he divides up his family into groups, putting his youngest son Joseph with his mother Rachel right at the back.



Gen 33. 1-2

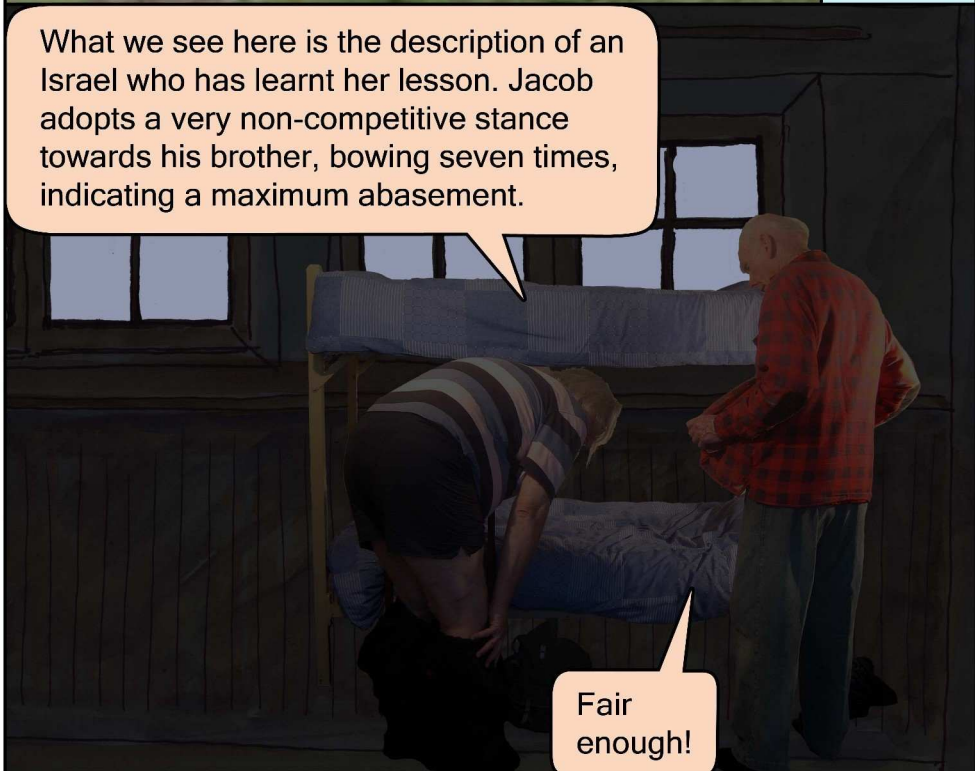


Then he goes out in front, bowing low to the ground every few steps, repeating this action seven times, till he comes near to his brother.



Gen 33. 3

What we see here is the description of an Israel who has learnt her lesson. Jacob adopts a very non-competitive stance towards his brother, bowing seven times, indicating a maximum abasement.



Fair enough!

Esau, however, runs to meet him, flinging his arm around Jacob's neck, kissing him and weeping with joy.



Who are these?

They are the children God has graciously given me.

Gen 33. 4-5

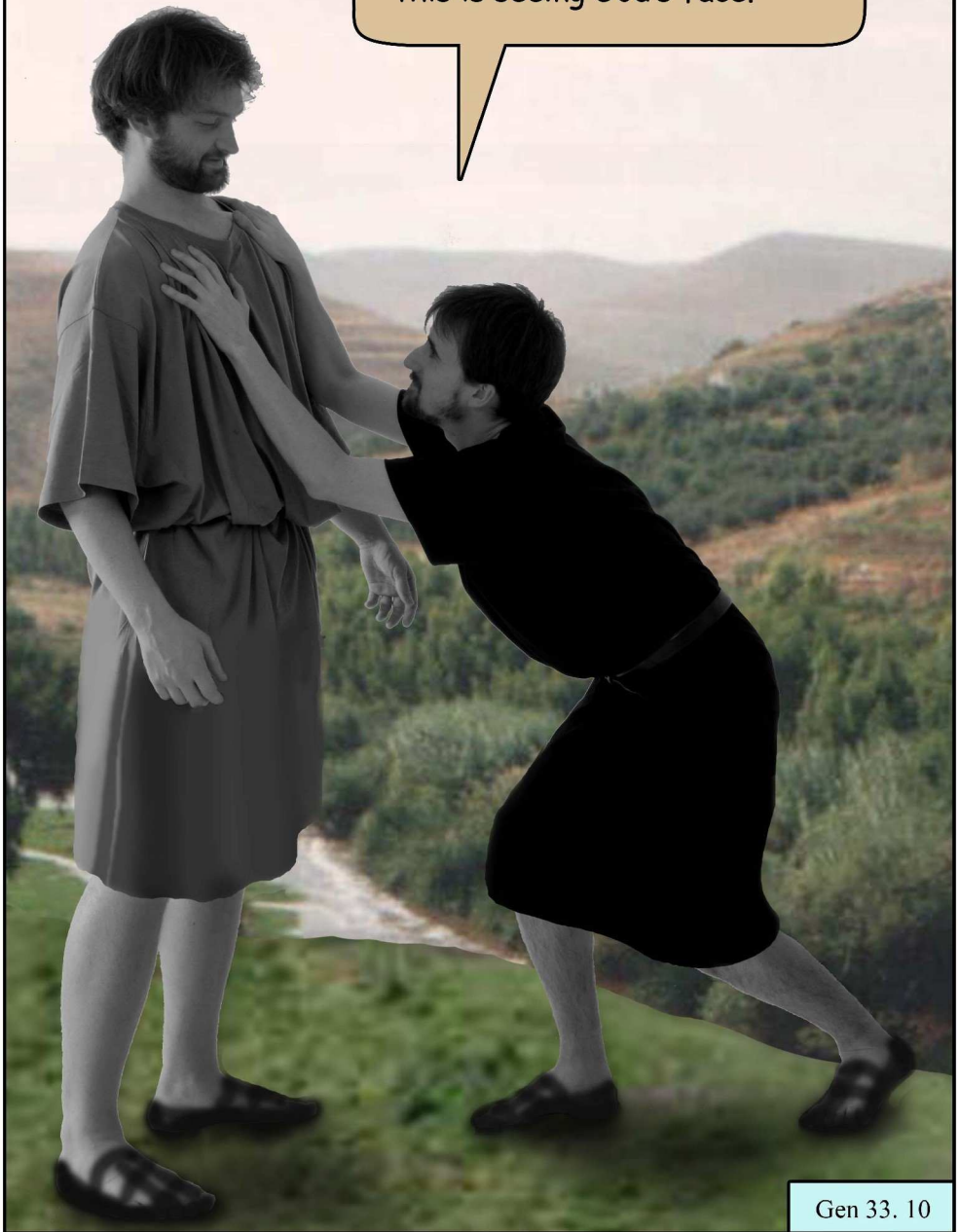


Gen 33. 8-9





No, brother, please, please.  
You really must accept them,  
I insist. For seeing you like  
this is seeing God's face.



Gen 33. 10



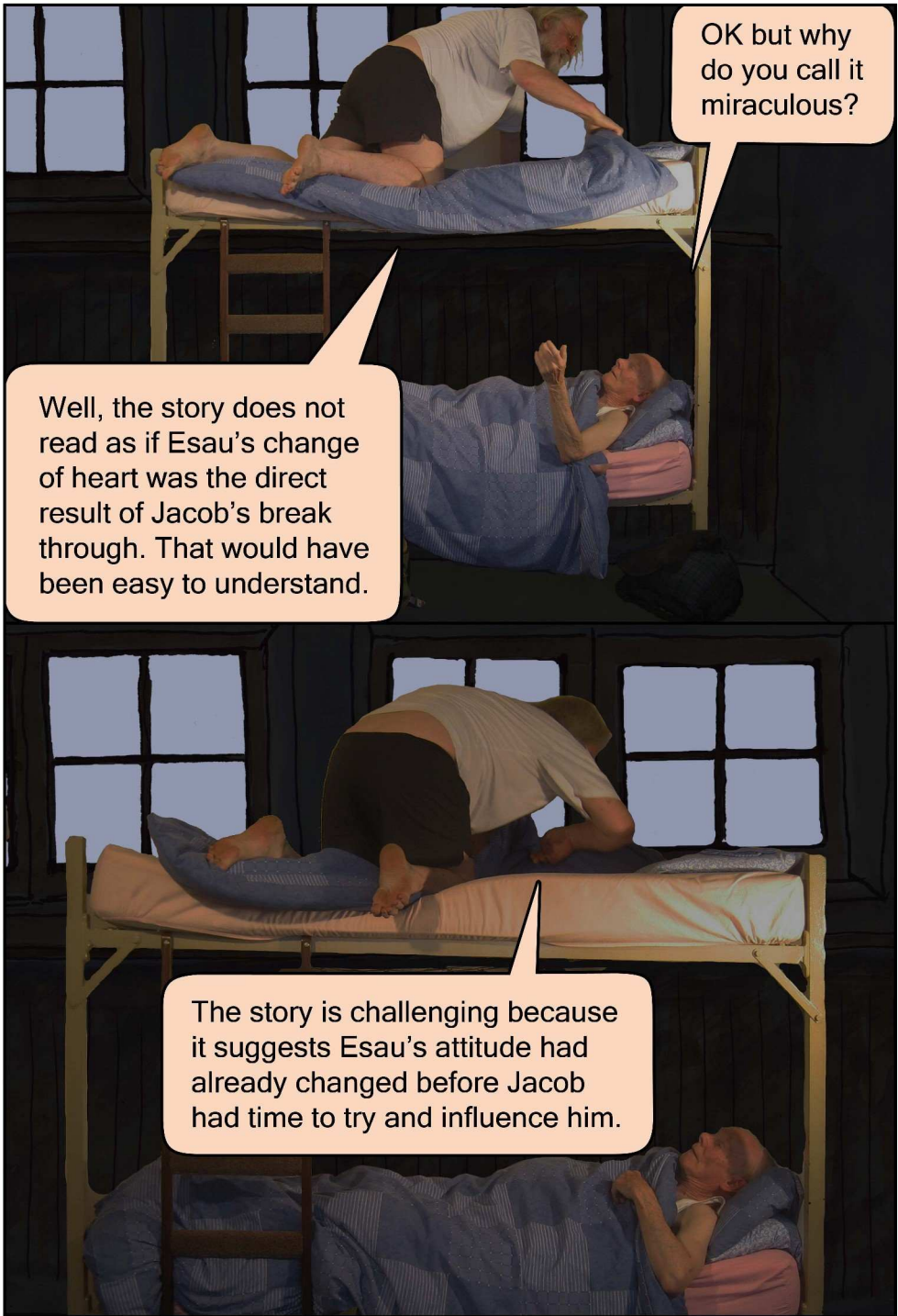
So there you have it: the proof!


What do you mean?

Well, telling Esau he sees God's face in his attitude can only mean that the political change Jacob has desperately been longing for in his brother, has now, finally, come about.







A photograph of a man in a white t-shirt and dark shorts lying on his stomach on the top bunk of a wooden bunk bed. He is holding a blue cloth or shirt over his head. Behind him is a large window with a dark frame. Below the bunk bed, an older man with white hair is lying on the floor, covered by a blue and white striped blanket. He is looking up towards the man on the bunk bed. A green bag is on the floor near the older man. Two speech bubbles are overlaid on the image: one at the top pointing towards the man on the bunk bed, and another on the right pointing towards the older man on the floor.

This is typical of our story-teller  
who always makes out marginal  
revolutionaries must do their  
job believing rather than  
knowing it will work.

Goodnight!

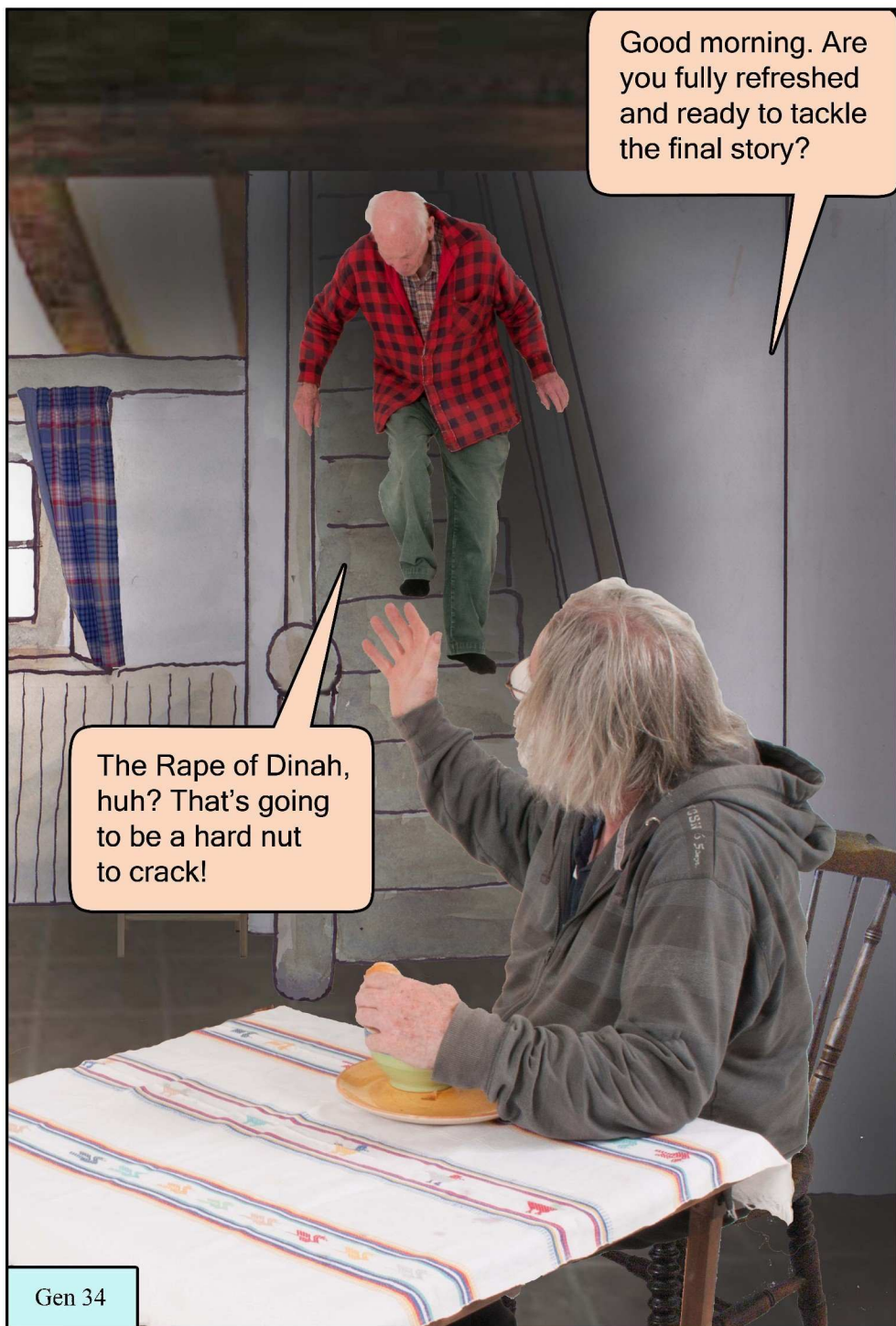




11

# Shechem's Rape of Dinah



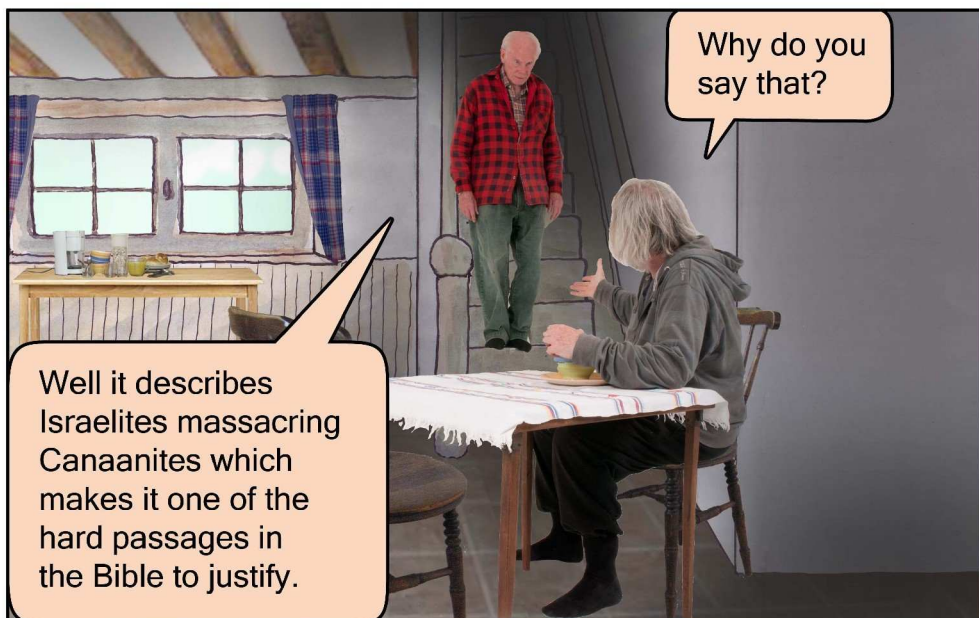


Good morning. Are you fully refreshed and ready to tackle the final story?

The Rape of Dinah, huh? That's going to be a hard nut to crack!

Gen 34







Very well. So give us the story. You'll find the breakfast stuff over there.

We are told that Jacob, eventually, had twelve sons: six by his first wife Leah; two by Leah's maid Bilhah; two more by Rachel his second wife's maid, Zilpah and finally two by Rachel herself. However, we are now told he also had a daughter by Leah and her name was Dinah.





The story relates that one day Dinah went out to visit some of the local women when Shechem, the son of a Canaanite prince, saw her and, overcome with lust, raped her (for, to him, she was of no account\*).

\* Editorial.



However, soon afterwards he realised he was in love with her. So he went to his father Hamor and told him he wanted her as a wife.

Gen 34. 1-5





Meanwhile Jacob had heard what had happened but, as his sons were away, he decided for the moment to do nothing.



Just then Hamor arrived to ask for the hand of his daughter, Dinah, on behalf of his son, just as Shechem had asked.



Gen 34. 6

At this point Joseph's sons came in from the fields boiling with rage for they had heard what had happened.



But Hamor spoke to them with great restraint and civility.

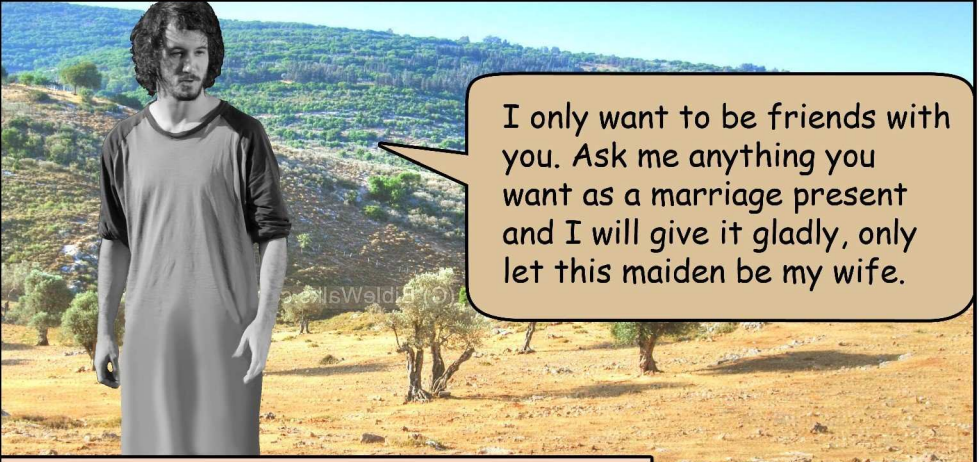


What has happened is most unfortunate but my son Shechem is very much in love with your daughter. So please give her to him as his wife. For if you are to live peaceably here with us then you should give your daughters to us and we should give our daughters to you. That way the land will be open to you and you will be able to live and trade with us peaceably.

Gen 34. 8-10



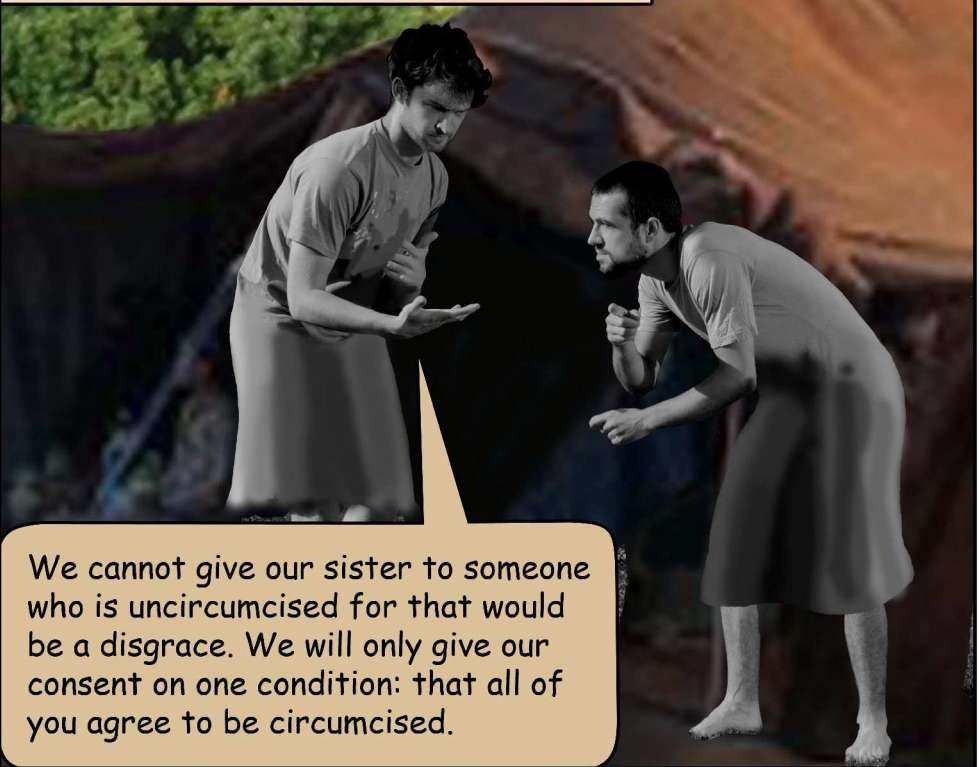
Shechem too spoke reasonably to Dinah's father and brothers:



I only want to be friends with you. Ask me anything you want as a marriage present and I will give it gladly, only let this maiden be my wife.

But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully

Gen 34. 11-15



We cannot give our sister to someone who is uncircumcised for that would be a disgrace. We will only give our consent on one condition: that all of you agree to be circumcised.





Two days later when the Canaanites were still very sore Jacob's sons grabbed their swords and, taking them completely unawares, killed Hamor and Shechem.

Gen 34. 25-26



They then rescued their sister Dinah

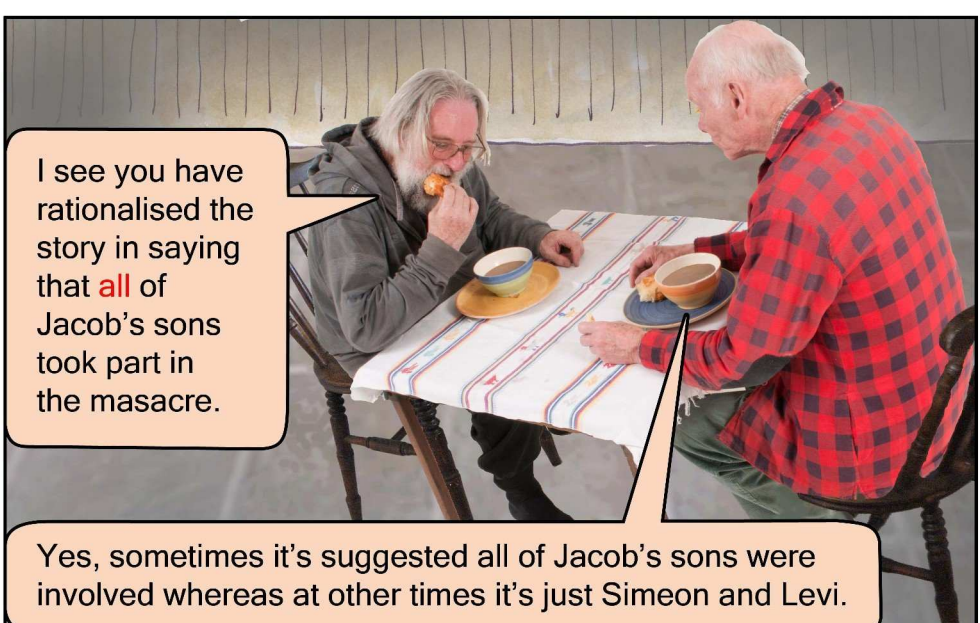


Finally they slew all the males in the city and took all the women and female children along with the livestock and anything they could find of value as booty.

Gen 34. 26-29



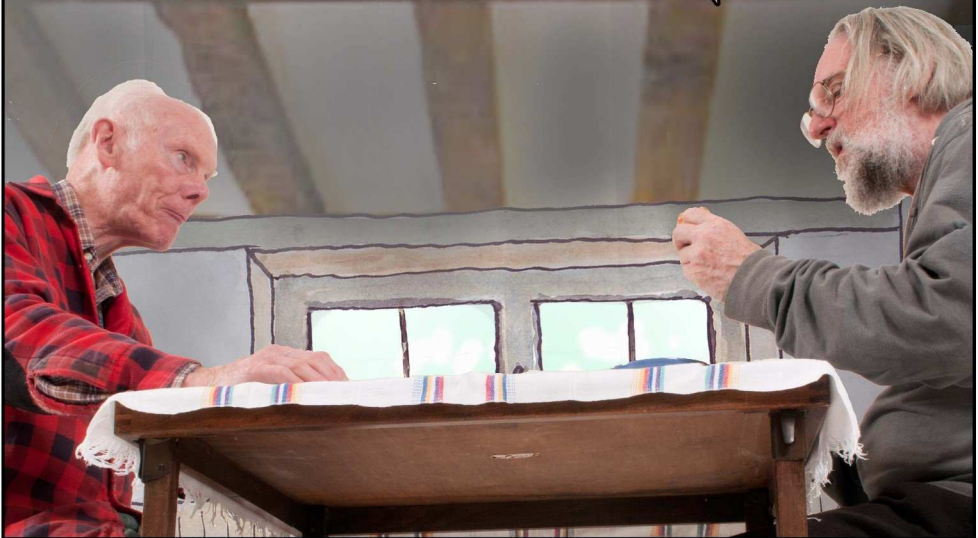


A photograph of two elderly men sitting at a wooden table covered with a white tablecloth featuring a colorful striped border. The man on the left has a long white beard and glasses, wearing a grey hoodie. He is eating a piece of orange. The man on the right is balding with white hair on the sides, wearing a red and black plaid shirt. He is also eating. On the table are two bowls of soup on saucers. The background is a simple wall with vertical lines.

I see you have rationalised the story in saying that **all** of Jacob's sons took part in the massacre.

Yes, sometimes it's suggested all of Jacob's sons were involved whereas at other times it's just Simeon and Levi.

I think the priestly editor was embarrassed by the idea that Israel could have done such a thing. So, just as the original story-teller had shielded Jacob, he too shielded the majority of the tribes. That's why he wrote a new ending for the story:



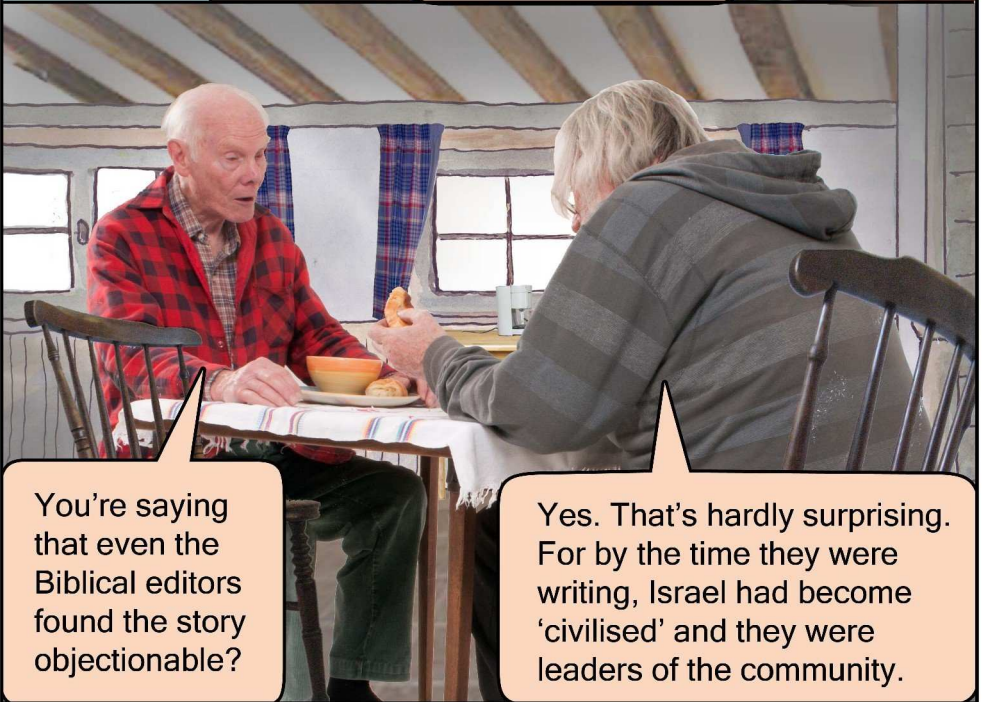


You have got me into deep trouble, making my name stink amongst the Canaanites. We are few in number so if they ever get together they will destroy me.



There was no call to treat our sister as a prostitute.

Gen 34. 30-31



You're saying that even the Biblical editors found the story objectionable?

Yes. That's hardly surprising. For by the time they were writing, Israel had become 'civilised' and they were leaders of the community.



So in saying this story is a representation we're saying it never happened?

Obviously. But we should take no comfort from that until we know what it means.

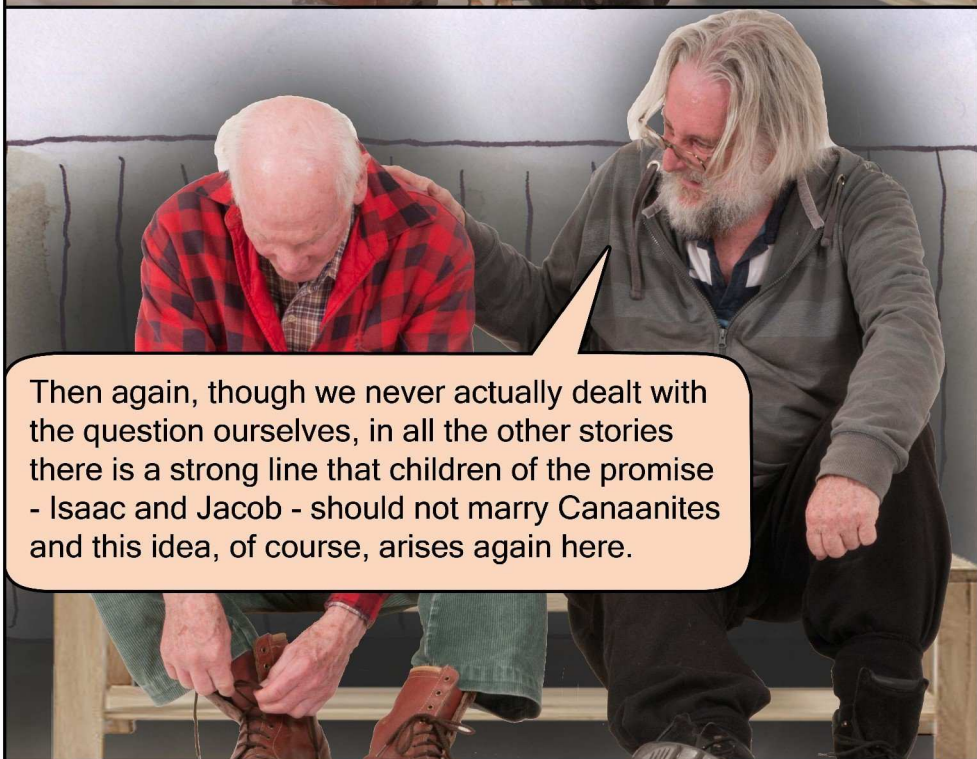


Come on then. Tell me!

Well, it's obviously anti-Canaanite and we have already noted anti-Canaanite tendencies in the other stories we have dealt with, haven't we?



For example, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were Canaanites and that story argued that Hebrews should be wary of assimilating with such civilised folk.



Then again, though we never actually dealt with the question ourselves, in all the other stories there is a strong line that children of the promise - Isaac and Jacob - should not marry Canaanites and this idea, of course, arises again here.





So you're telling me the Hebrews were a bunch of anti-progress Luddites?

I'm not telling you anything. I'm simply trying to help you work out what the text is saying!

Well, it seems to me there is more, much more in this anti-Canaanite sentiment than a fear of progress.

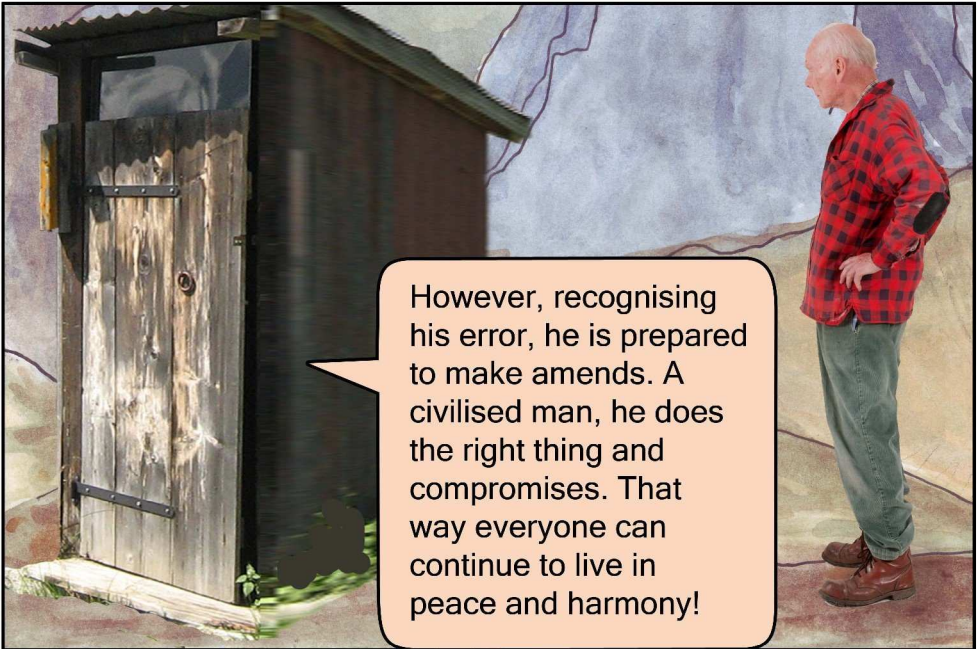
Quite right. But what is it?

Well, in the past I have seen it as having to do with religion; the Canaanites being a people who indulged in all sorts of foul practices like religious prostitution, child sacrifices and stuff.

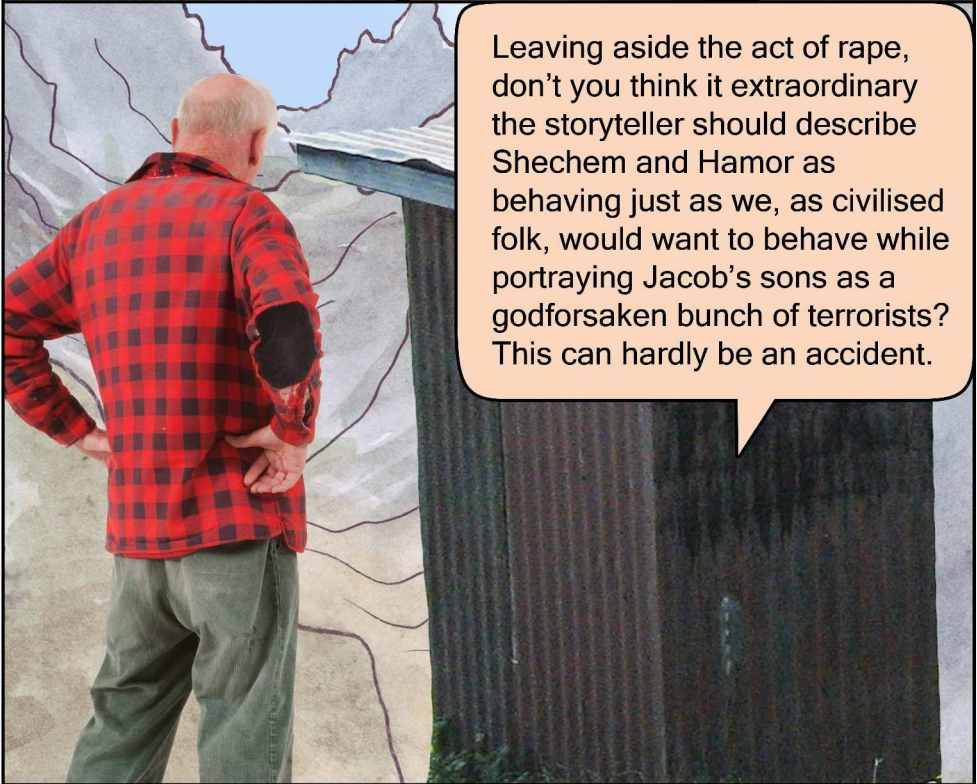
There's no indication of that being the case here.

Admittedly Shechem, an alpha male, rapes Dinah, thereby treating her and the Hebrews with contempt...





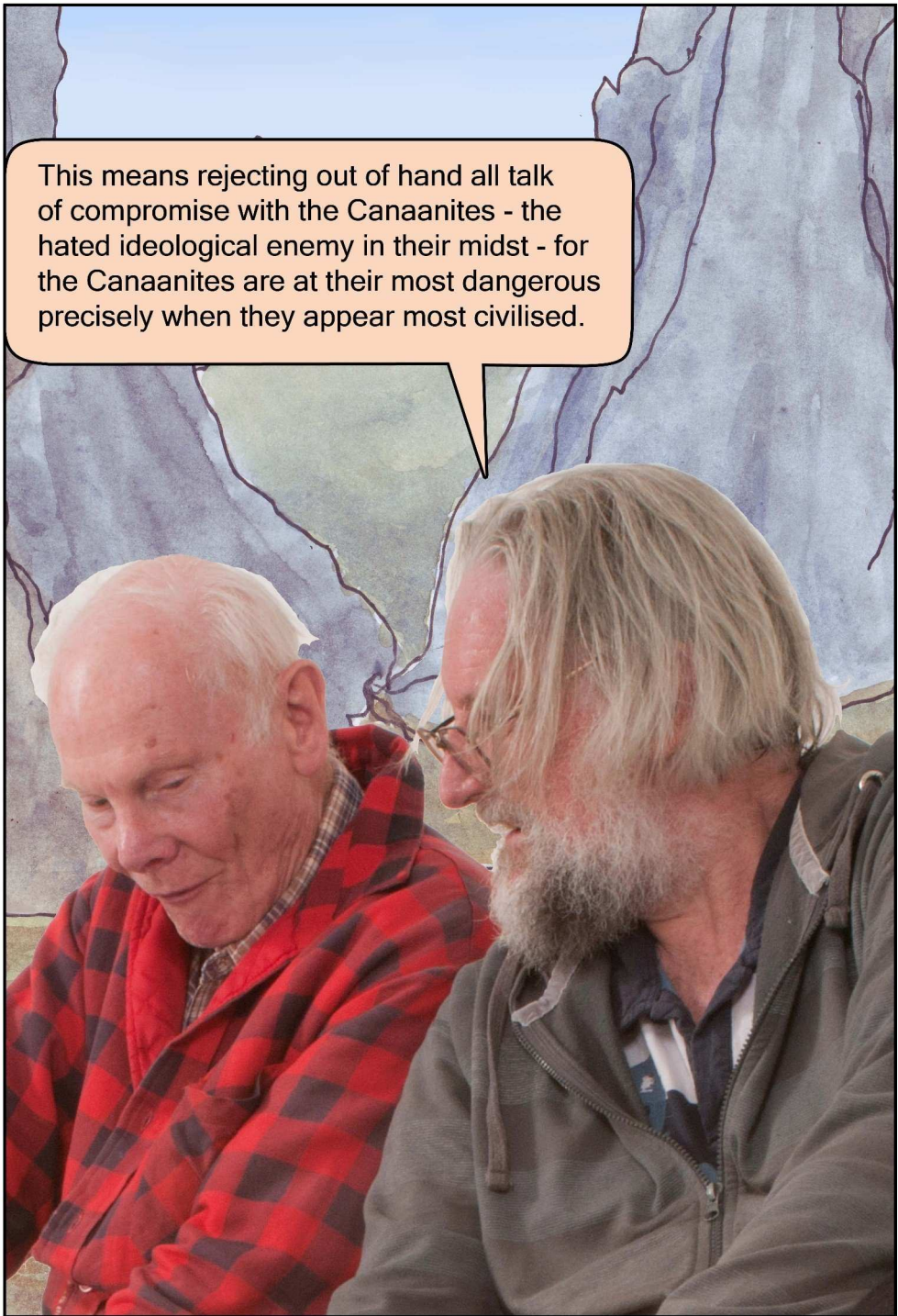
However, recognising his error, he is prepared to make amends. A civilised man, he does the right thing and compromises. That way everyone can continue to live in peace and harmony!



Leaving aside the act of rape, don't you think it extraordinary the storyteller should describe Shechem and Hamor as behaving just as we, as civilised folk, would want to behave while portraying Jacob's sons as a godforsaken bunch of terrorists? This can hardly be an accident.







This means rejecting out of hand all talk of compromise with the Canaanites - the hated ideological enemy in their midst - for the Canaanites are at their most dangerous precisely when they appear most civilised.







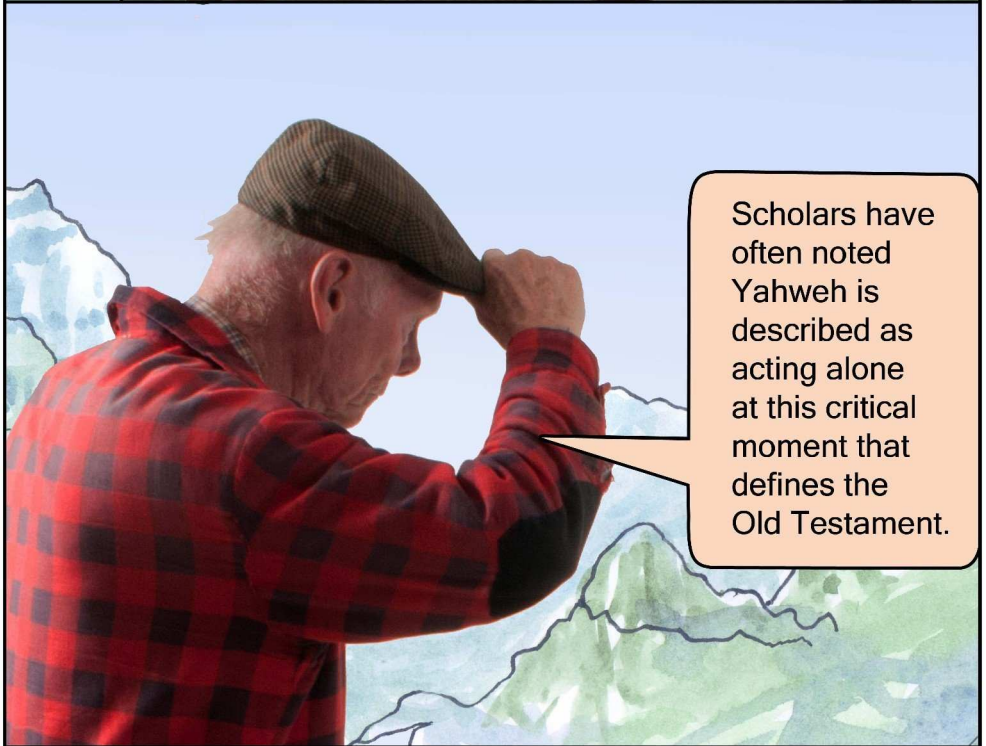


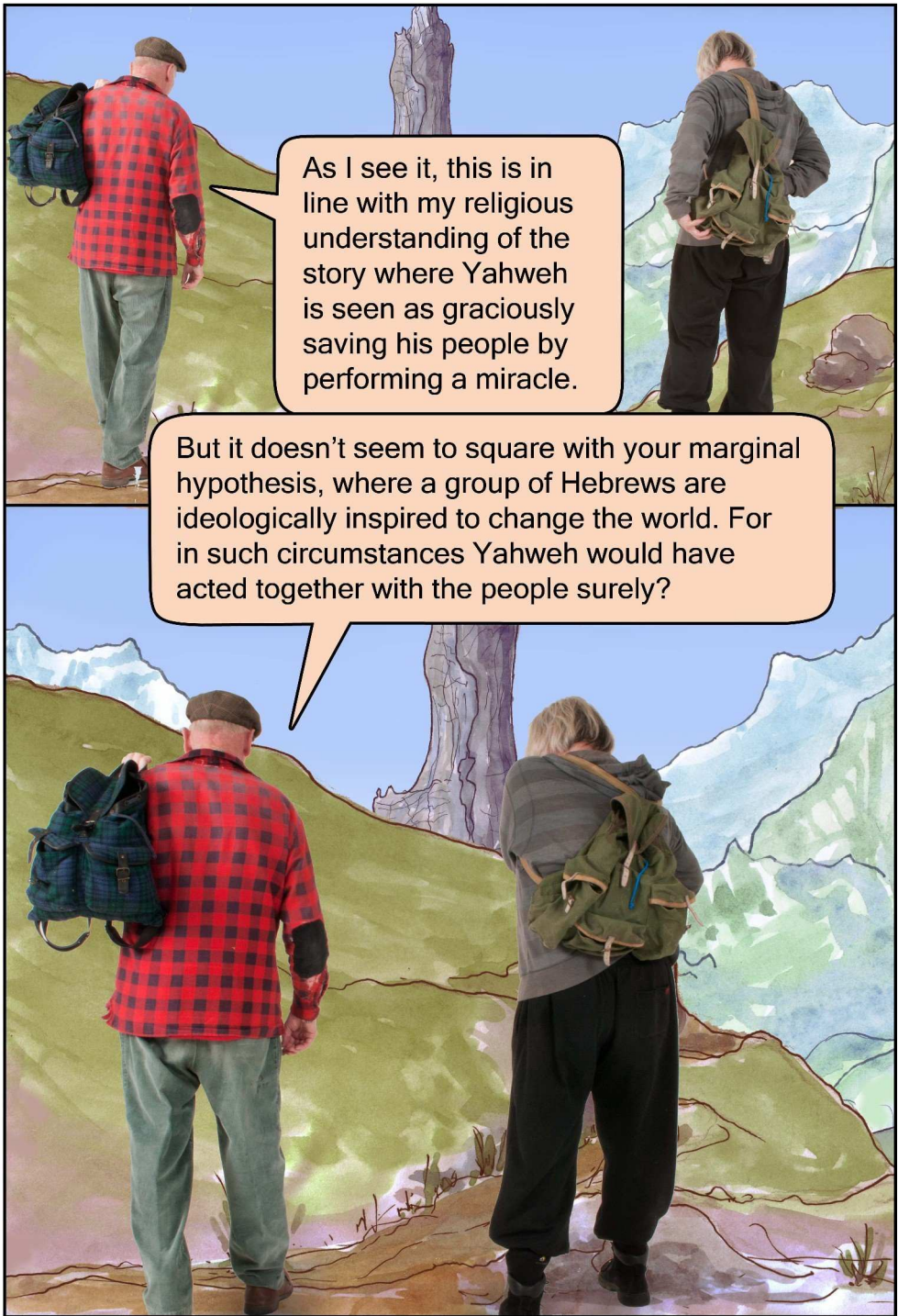
# 12

## The Exodus Story

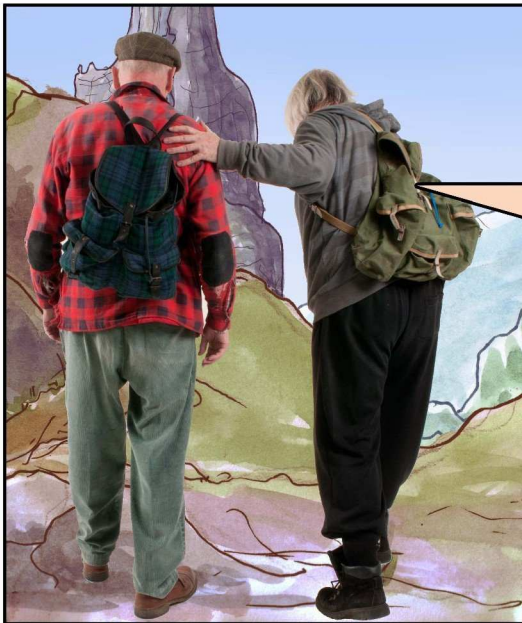










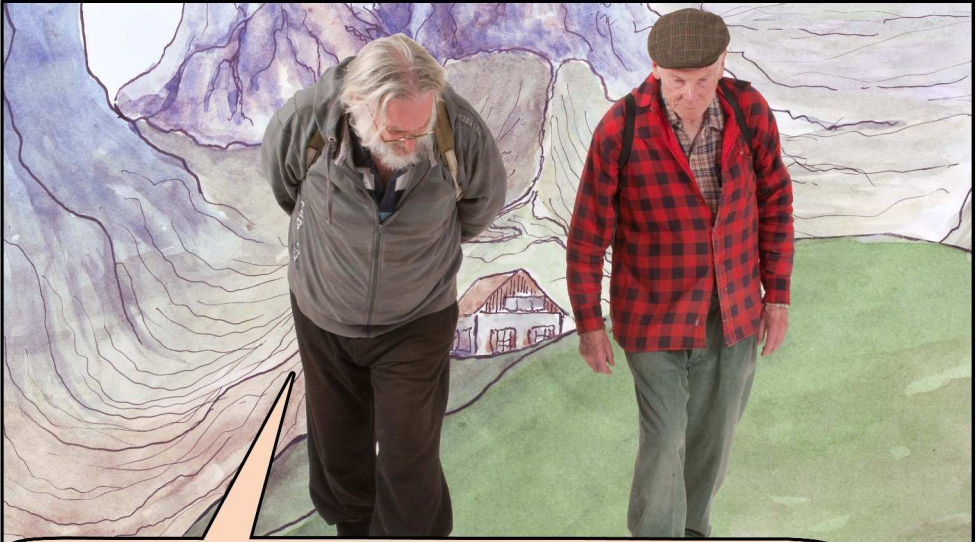


We're back to the same old scenario. For you and I both know God doesn't perform miracles. So, if your take on the story is correct, we're dealing with a fairytale: a lot of stuff and nonsense designed to keep people in their place, taking no initiative and just waiting for God to act.

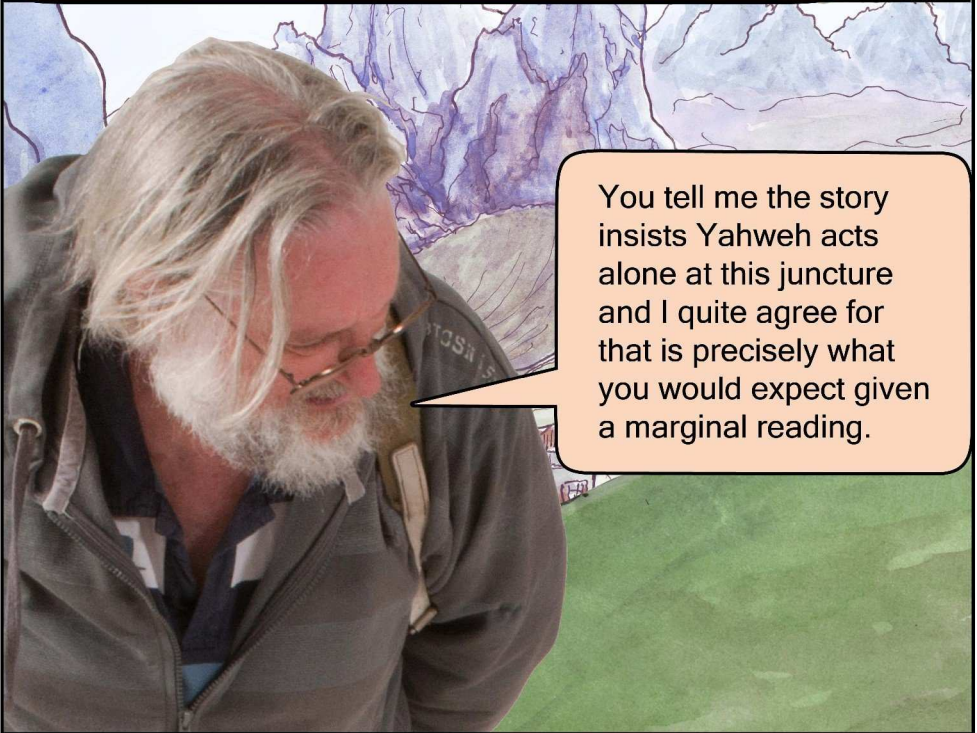


I grant you that that was how the priestly editors wanted people to read the text. But was it the way in which the story-teller designed it in the first place?






I don't think it was, partly because I don't think the story's about such stuff and nonsense, but more importantly I think it makes better sense read differently.



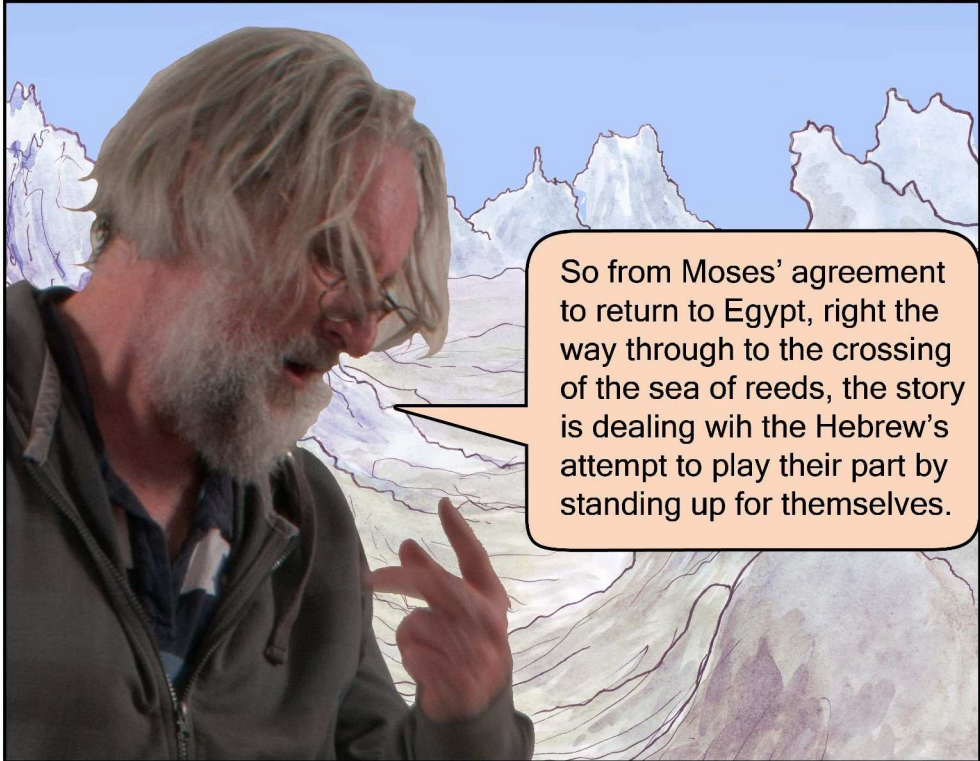
You tell me the story insists Yahweh acts alone at this juncture and I quite agree for that is precisely what you would expect given a marginal reading.

At the risk of being a bore let me remind you, one last time, that the covenant agreement between the Hebrew marginals and their god was that, if they stood up for themselves in an attempt to shame civilisation, he would see them right.



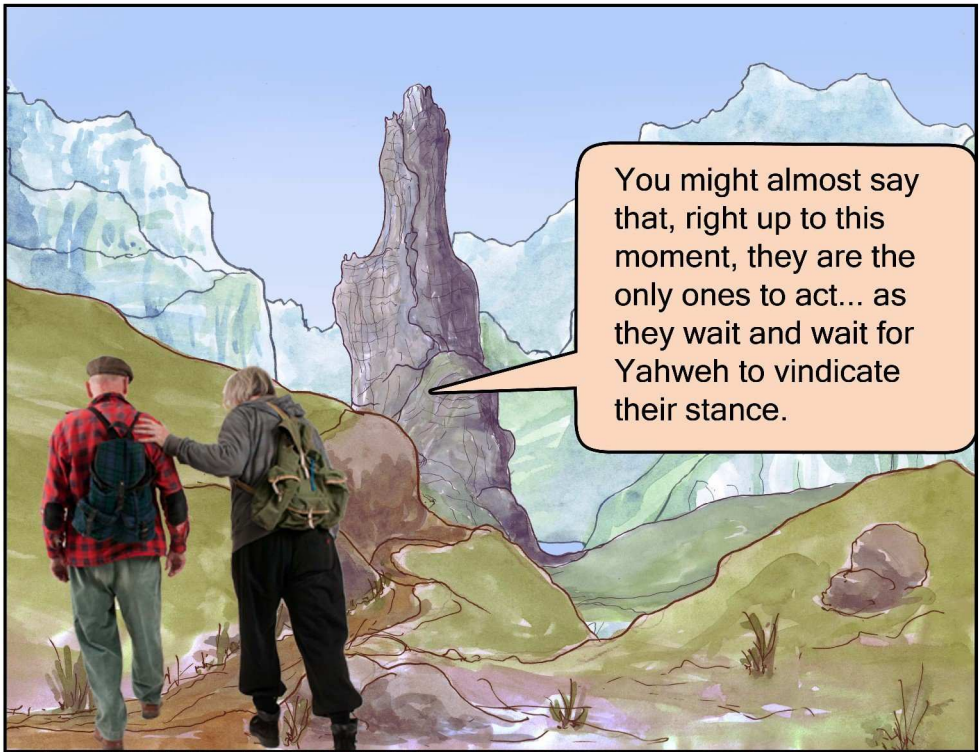
The situation is not complicated. You have to stand up for yourselves and I have to make the effort.

**Groan!**



So from Moses' agreement to return to Egypt, right the way through to the crossing of the sea of reeds, the story is dealing with the Hebrew's attempt to play their part by standing up for themselves.



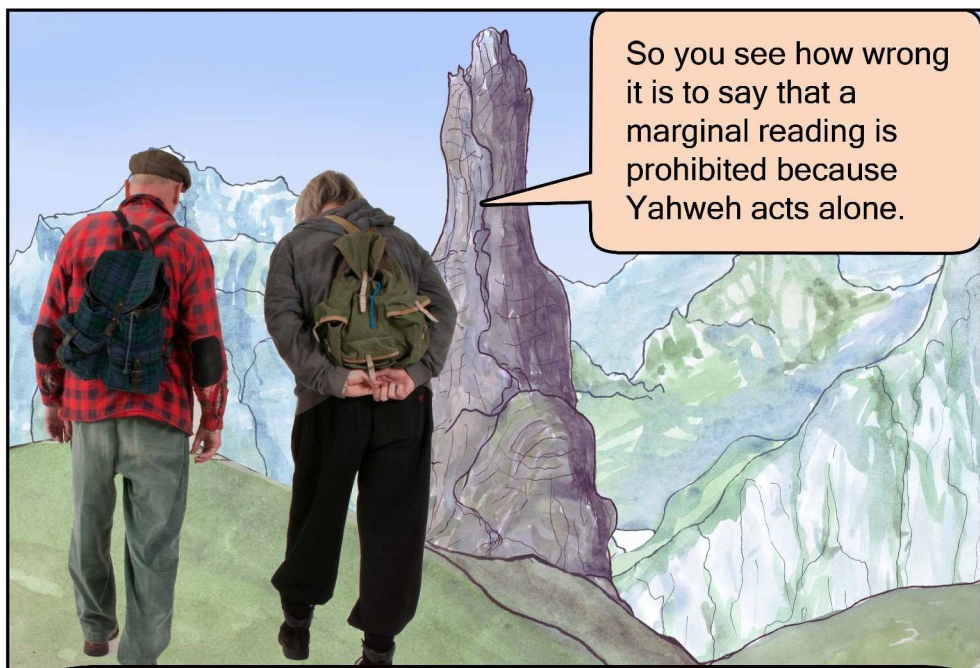


You might almost say that, right up to this moment, they are the only ones to act... as they wait and wait for Yahweh to vindicate their stance.



This being the case, what happens next is simply Yahweh, at last, standing up to the mark and, now that the chips are down, fulfilling his side of the bargain.

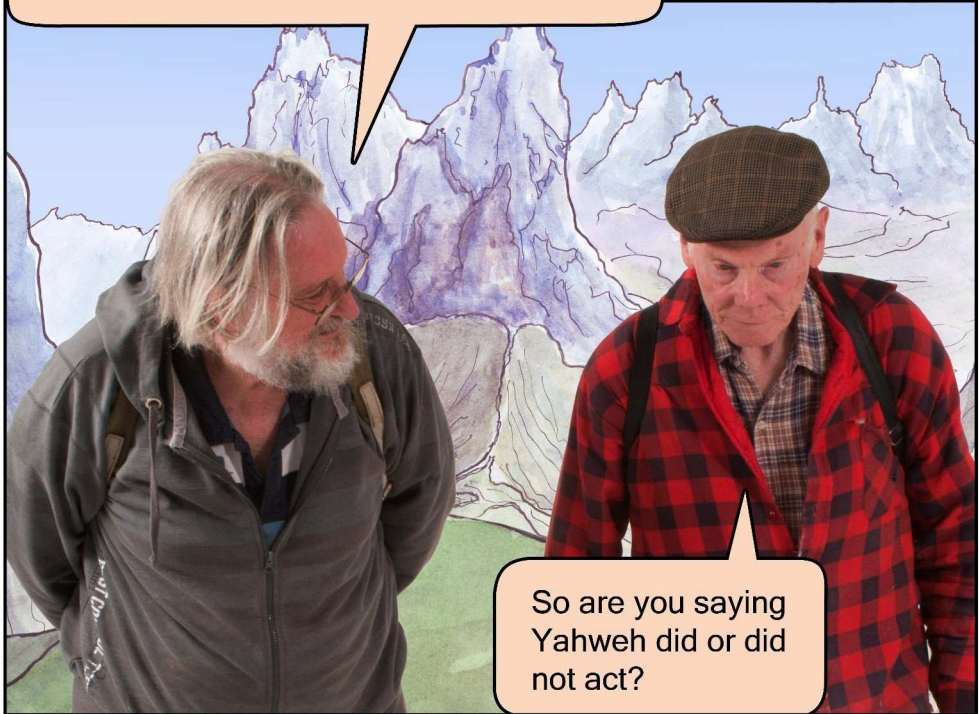
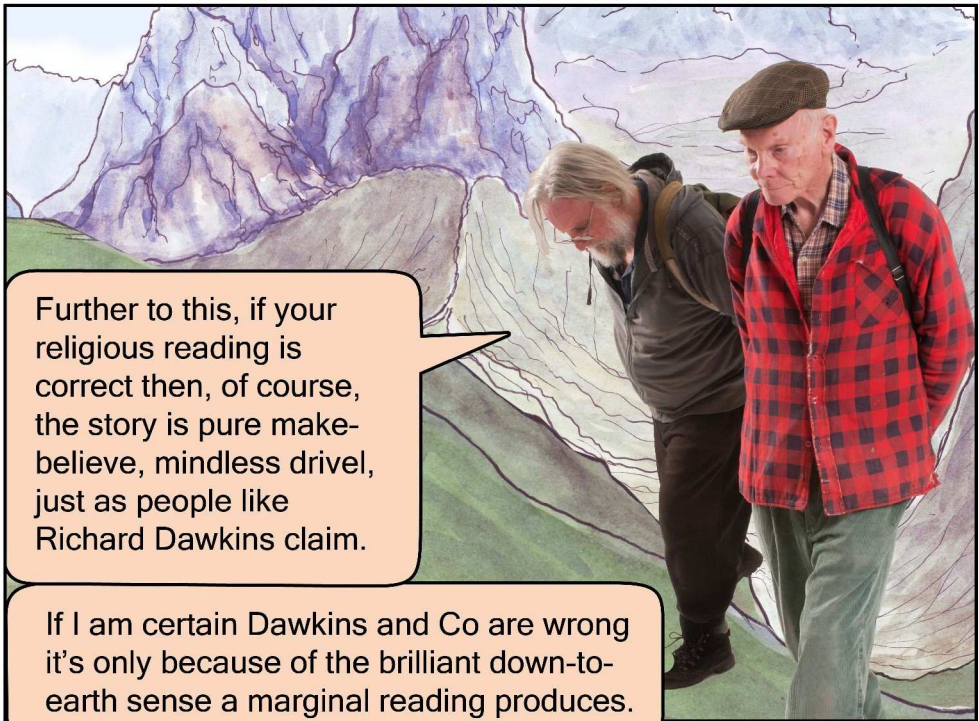




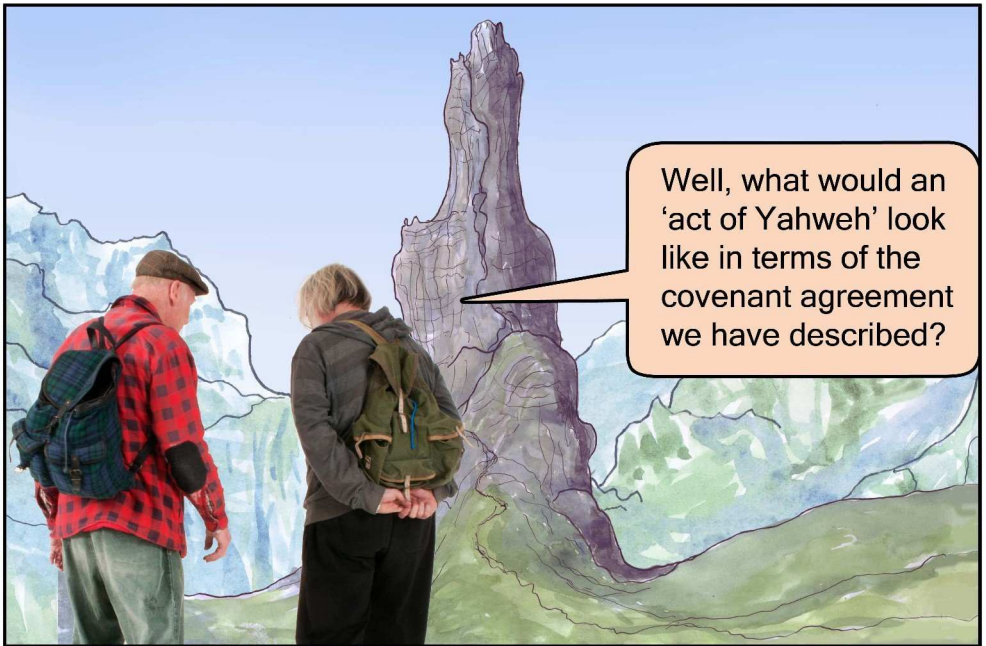
So you see how wrong it is to say that a marginal reading is prohibited because Yahweh acts alone.

In fact, the real difference between our understandings is that, whereas my marginal reading gives due weight to the Hebrew struggle, your religious reading reduces it to mindless obedience: a closing of the eyes and hoping for the best!

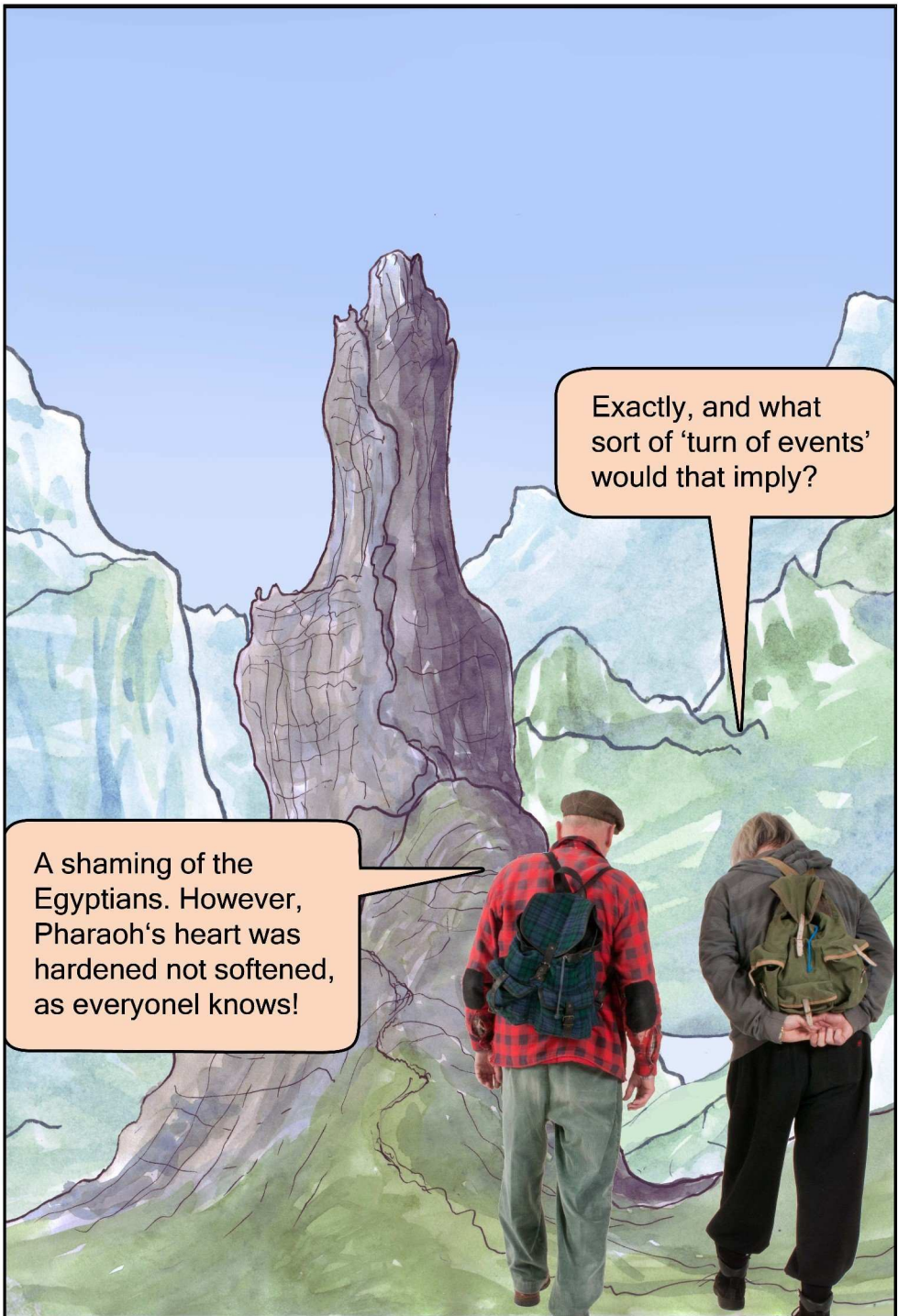


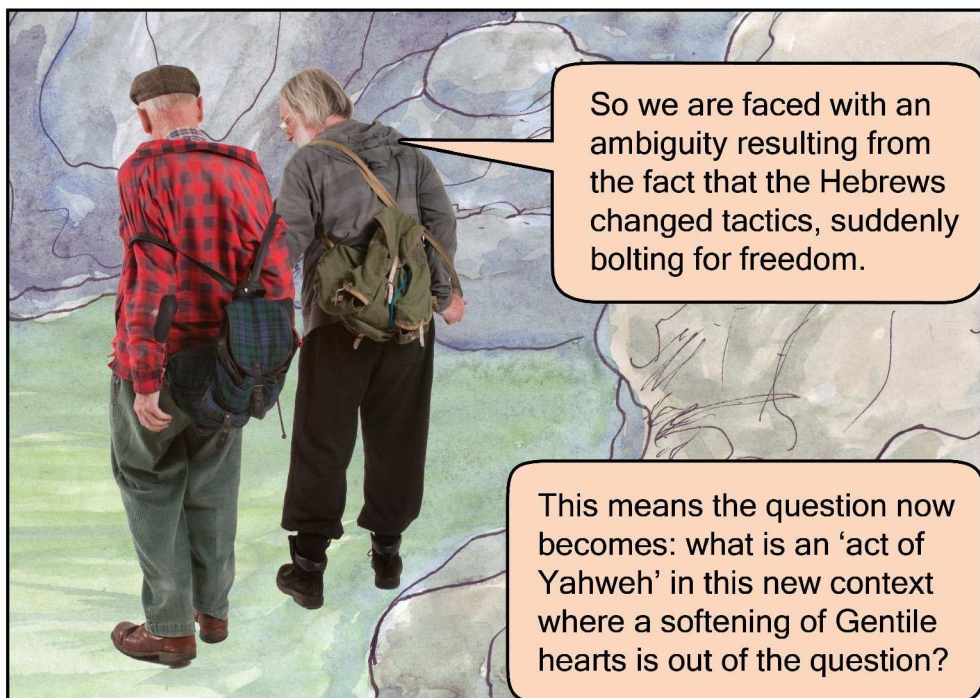




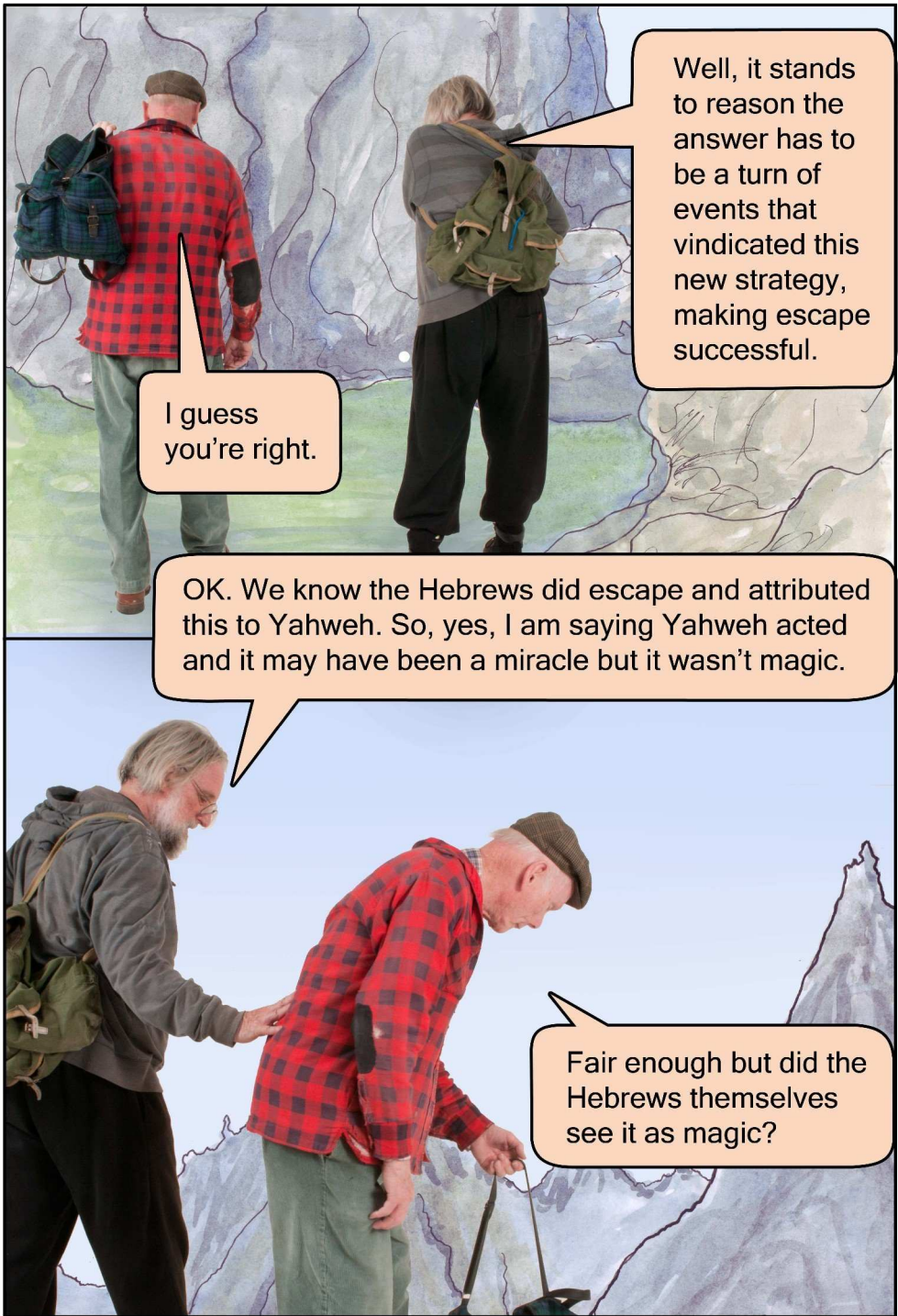













Well, it stands to reason the answer has to be a turn of events that vindicated this new strategy, making escape successful.

I guess you're right.

OK. We know the Hebrews did escape and attributed this to Yahweh. So, yes, I am saying Yahweh acted and it may have been a miracle but it wasn't magic.

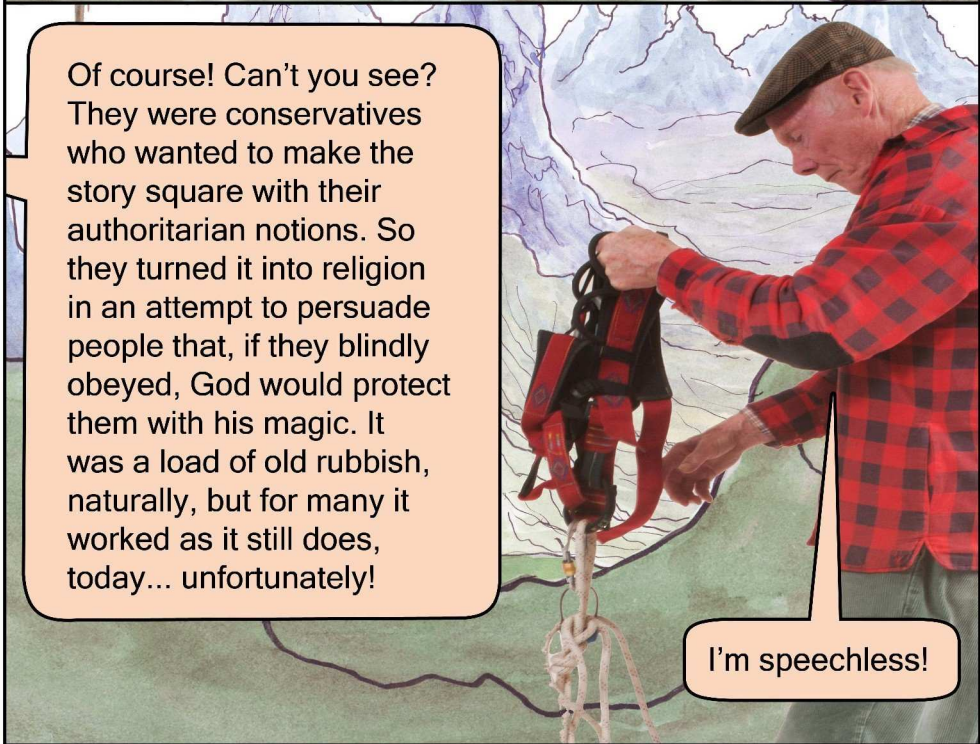
Fair enough but did the Hebrews themselves see it as magic?





Of course not for they were simply using myth language to talk politics and there is no room for magic in political discussion! It was revisionist priests who later introduced religion and magic into the story.

Really?



Of course! Can't you see? They were conservatives who wanted to make the story square with their authoritarian notions. So they turned it into religion in an attempt to persuade people that, if they blindly obeyed, God would protect them with his magic. It was a load of old rubbish, naturally, but for many it worked as it still does, today... unfortunately!

I'm speechless!



13

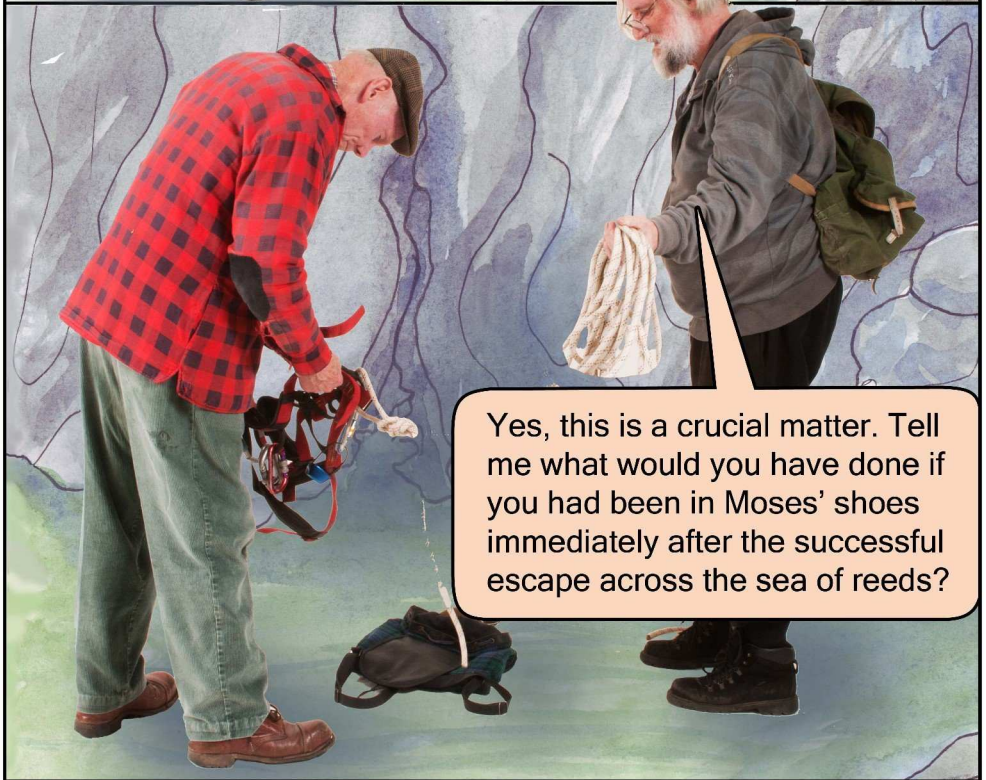
Moses



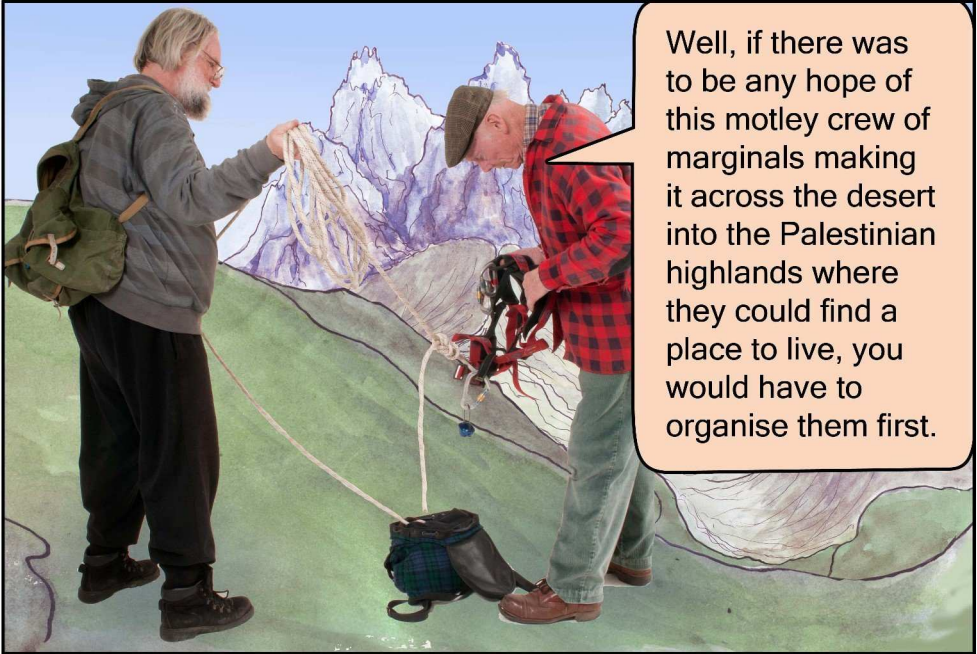




I'd like you now to tell me a bit more about Moses. You've explained that he's portrayed here as a marginal hero which means he's quite unlike the civilisation-hero, Sargon, but I haven't quite got the hang of it.



Yes, this is a crucial matter. Tell me what would you have done if you had been in Moses' shoes immediately after the successful escape across the sea of reeds?



Well, if there was to be any hope of this motley crew of marginals making it across the desert into the Palestinian highlands where they could find a place to live, you would have to organise them first.



Yes, that's certainly what Sargon would have done. But, tell me now, what did Moses in fact do?



Well, as far as organisation is concerned, he did nothing. The story describes him as leading the people into the Sin desert where they constantly complain to him about the conditions.

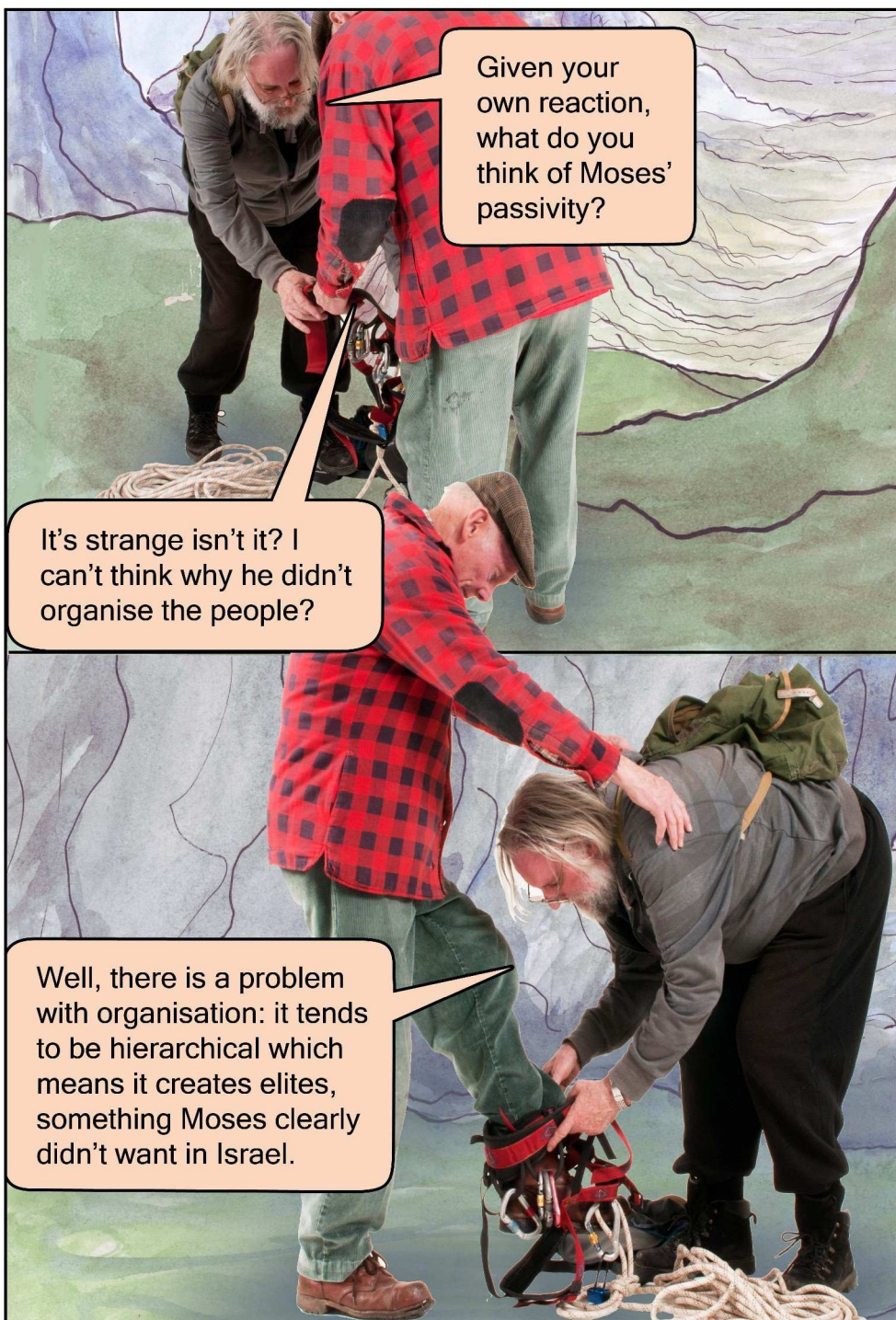


Ex. 16. 2-8



Ex. 17. 2-7

This happens again and again and instead of learning to become self-sufficient the people persist in forcing Moses to rescue them every time they are confronted by a problem.





You may be right. It was in fact Jethro, Moses father-in-law, who eventually persuaded him to introduce some organisation.

Why do you sit here alone all day with these people milling idly around you?



Ex. 18. 13-16

Because they don't know how to behave and need me to settle their disputes.

This is interesting. I could understand people needing Moses' expertise as regards living in the desert. But this does not seem to have been the issue.




No they appear to lack all knowledge of communal living which surely can't have been the case.



To understand what's going on we need to look more closely at the actual words used.



Moses actually says people with disputes come to him to 'inquire of God'.

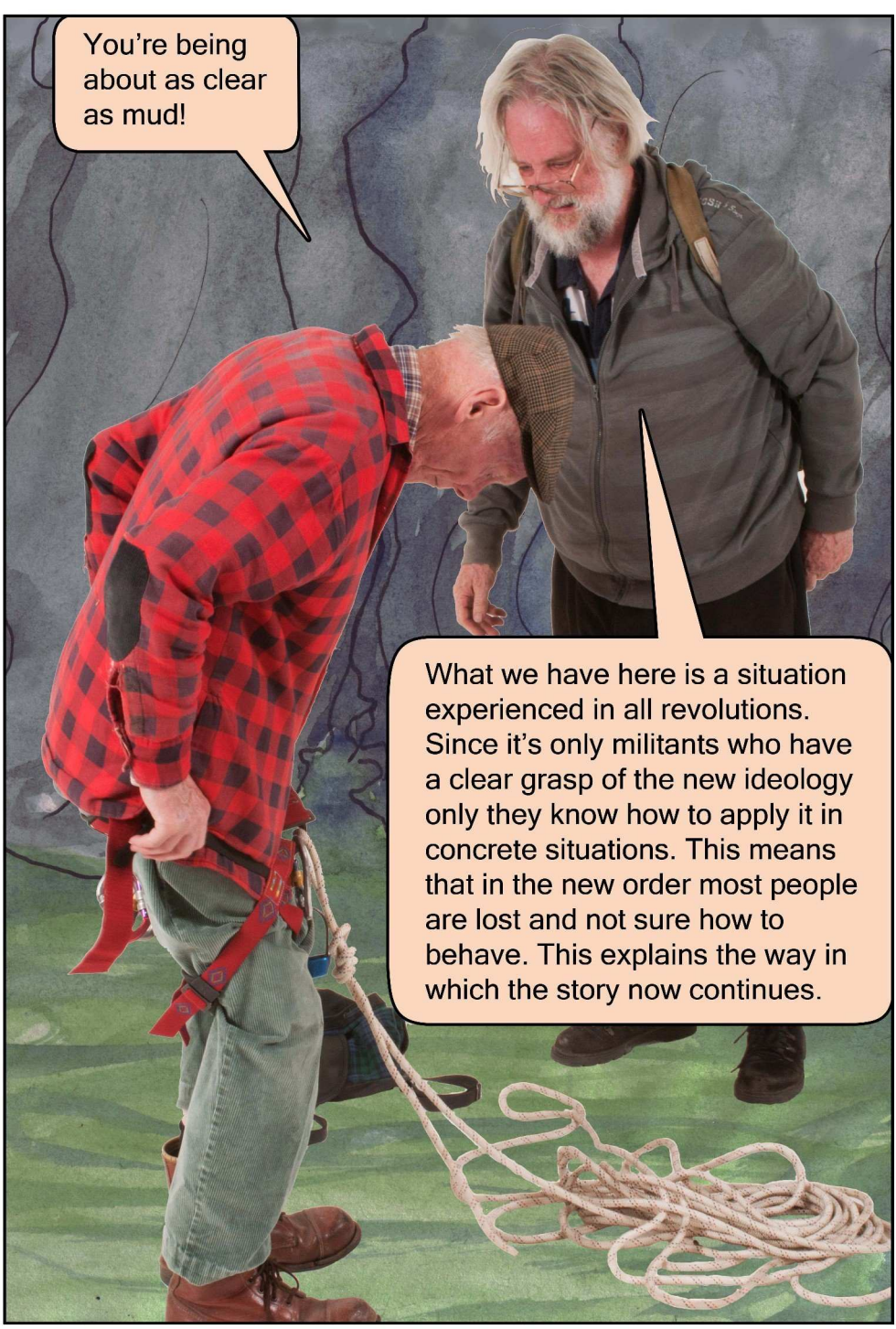


Yes, it's easy  
to miss that  
bit isn't it?

What are you  
hinting at?

Well, if you think about it, in Egypt  
the Hebrews would inevitably have  
got used to civilisation-standards of  
behaviour. Consequently, they are  
now completely lost given these  
standards no longer apply. They  
constantly need to be told how  
Yahweh's revolutionary 'marginal'  
standards work, presenting Moses  
with a regular headache.





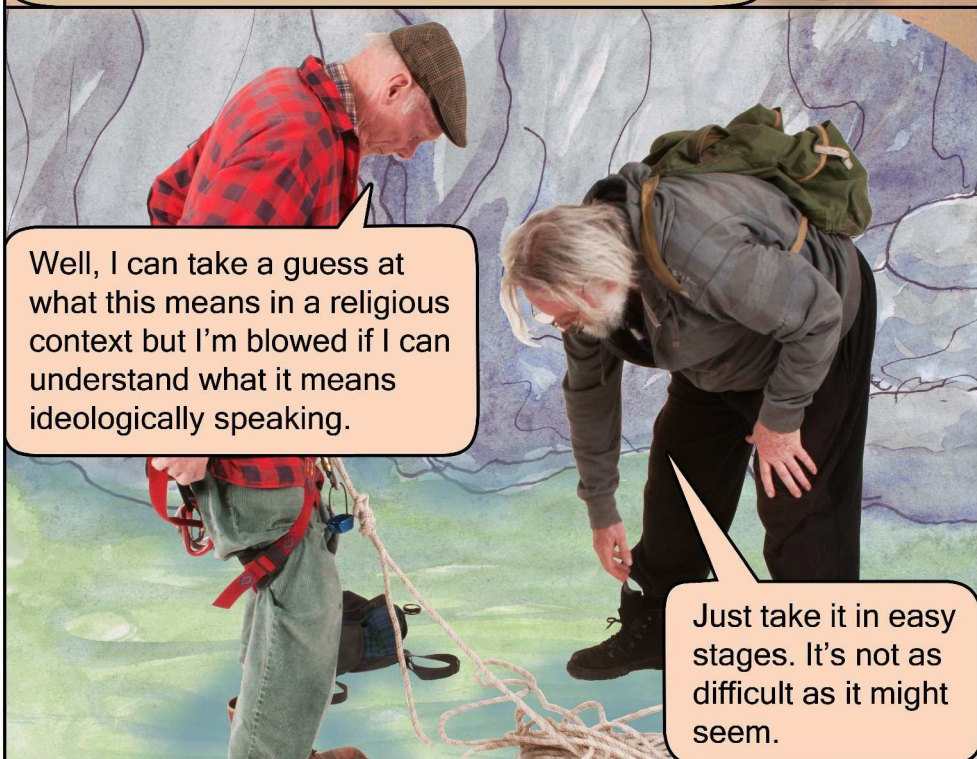
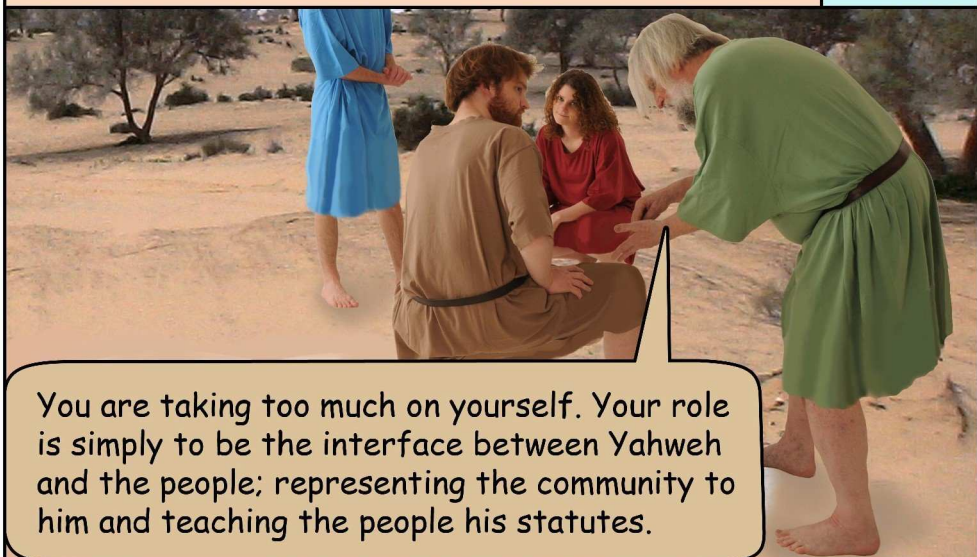
You're being  
about as clear  
as mud!

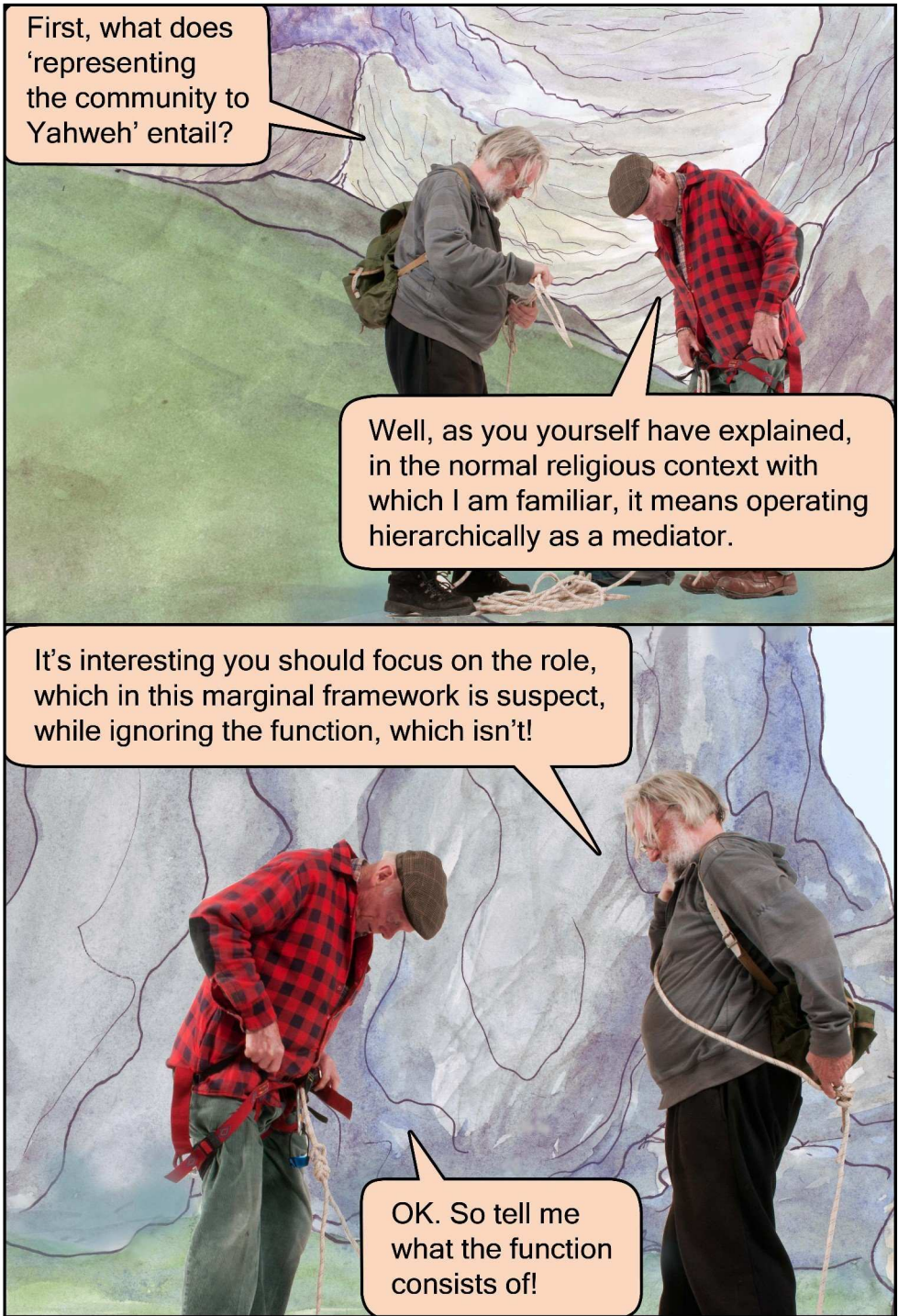
What we have here is a situation  
experienced in all revolutions.  
Since it's only militants who have  
a clear grasp of the new ideology  
only they know how to apply it in  
concrete situations. This means  
that in the new order most people  
are lost and not sure how to  
behave. This explains the way in  
which the story now continues.



Jethro tells Moses he can't go on in the way he is doing since he is effectively killing himself.

Ex. 18. 20











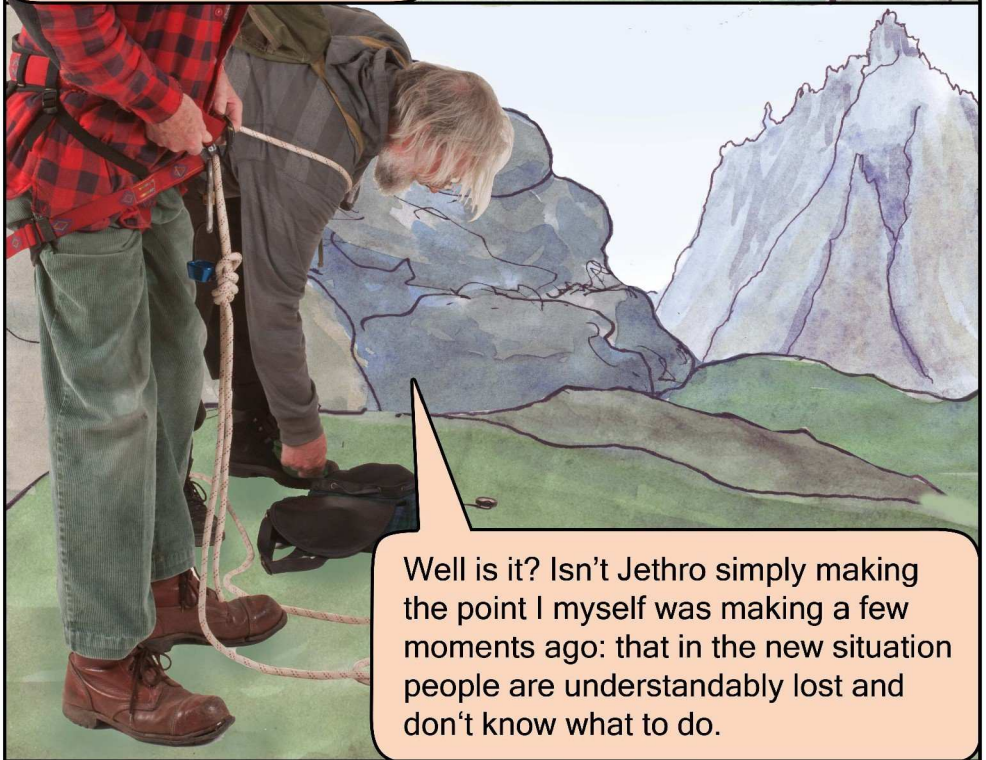
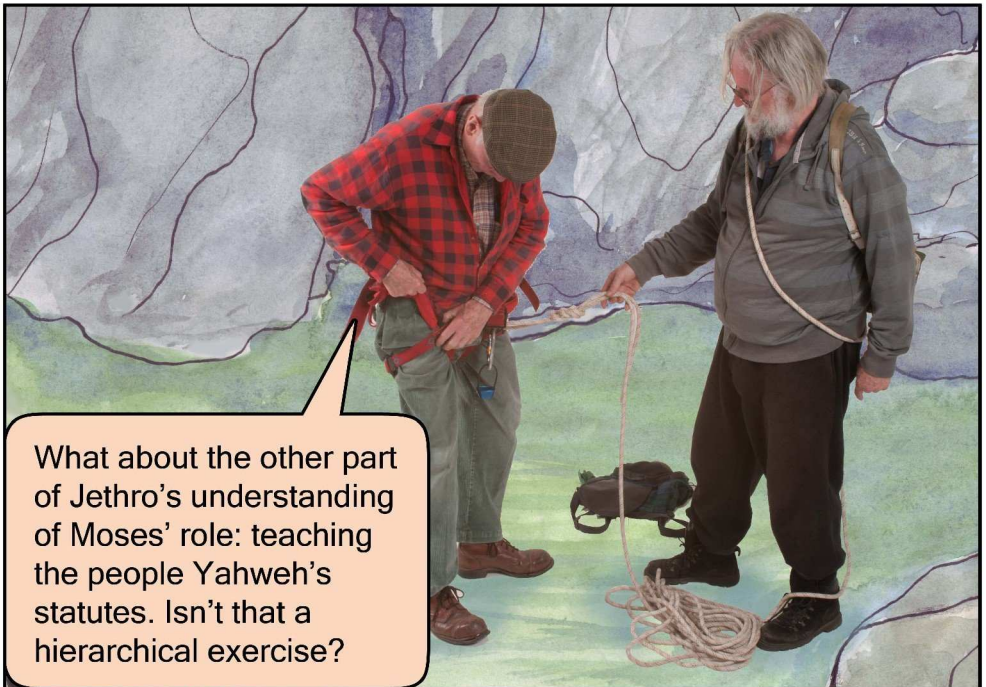


14

# Moses and the Law





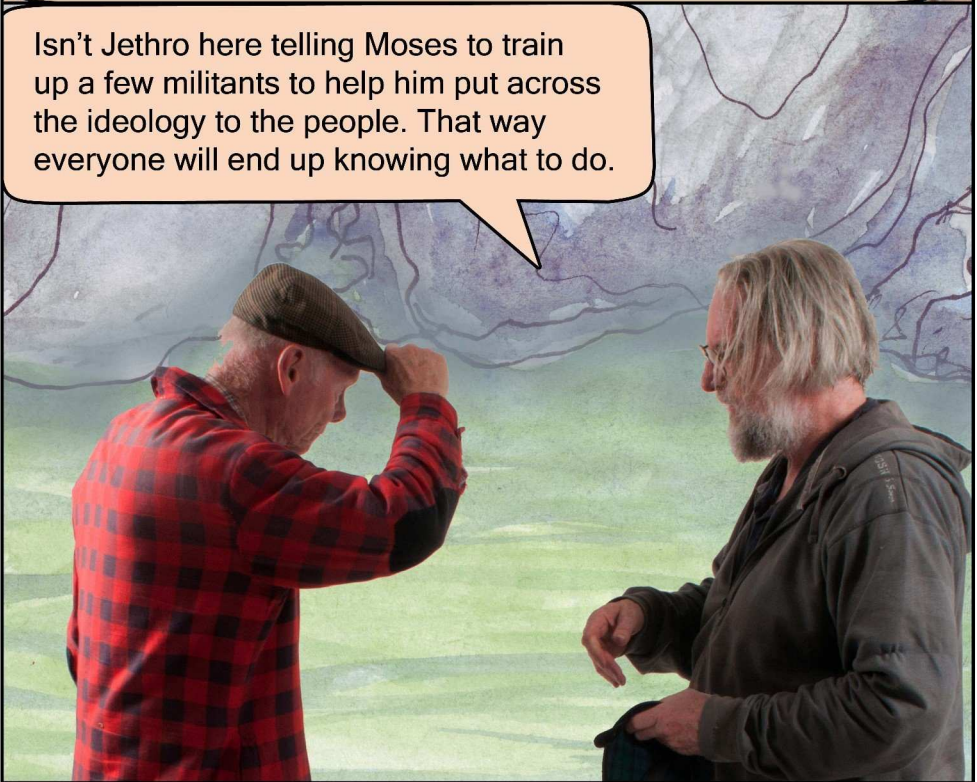




Ex. 18.21-23

Select capable men who are trustworthy and fear God and appoint them as judges. They can bring important matters to you but judge simple cases themselves. That will take the load off you and all these people will go home satisfied.

Isn't Jethro here telling Moses to train up a few militants to help him put across the ideology to the people. That way everyone will end up knowing what to do.





I would suggest that there is nothing intrinsically hierarchical, or more correctly centrarchical, in all of this, which was why Moses was able to take his father-in-law's advice.



So you see the next bit of the story - the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai - as Moses' way of putting the new revolutionary ideology into peoples hands?



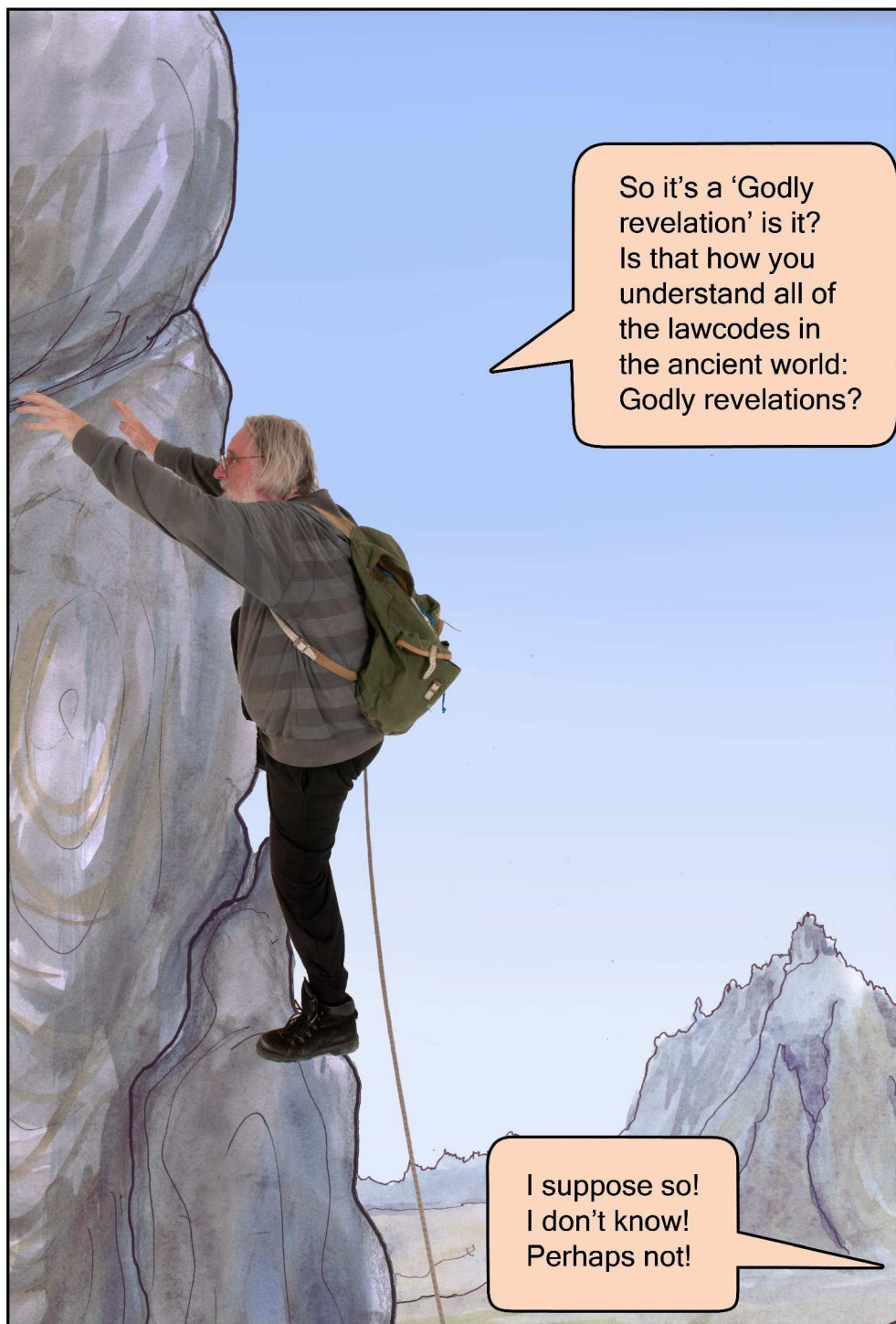
It's what the text suggests wouldn't you say?



Perhaps. I don't know. It's surely not the way in which the giving of the Law is usually understood.

Tell me then how it's usually understood!

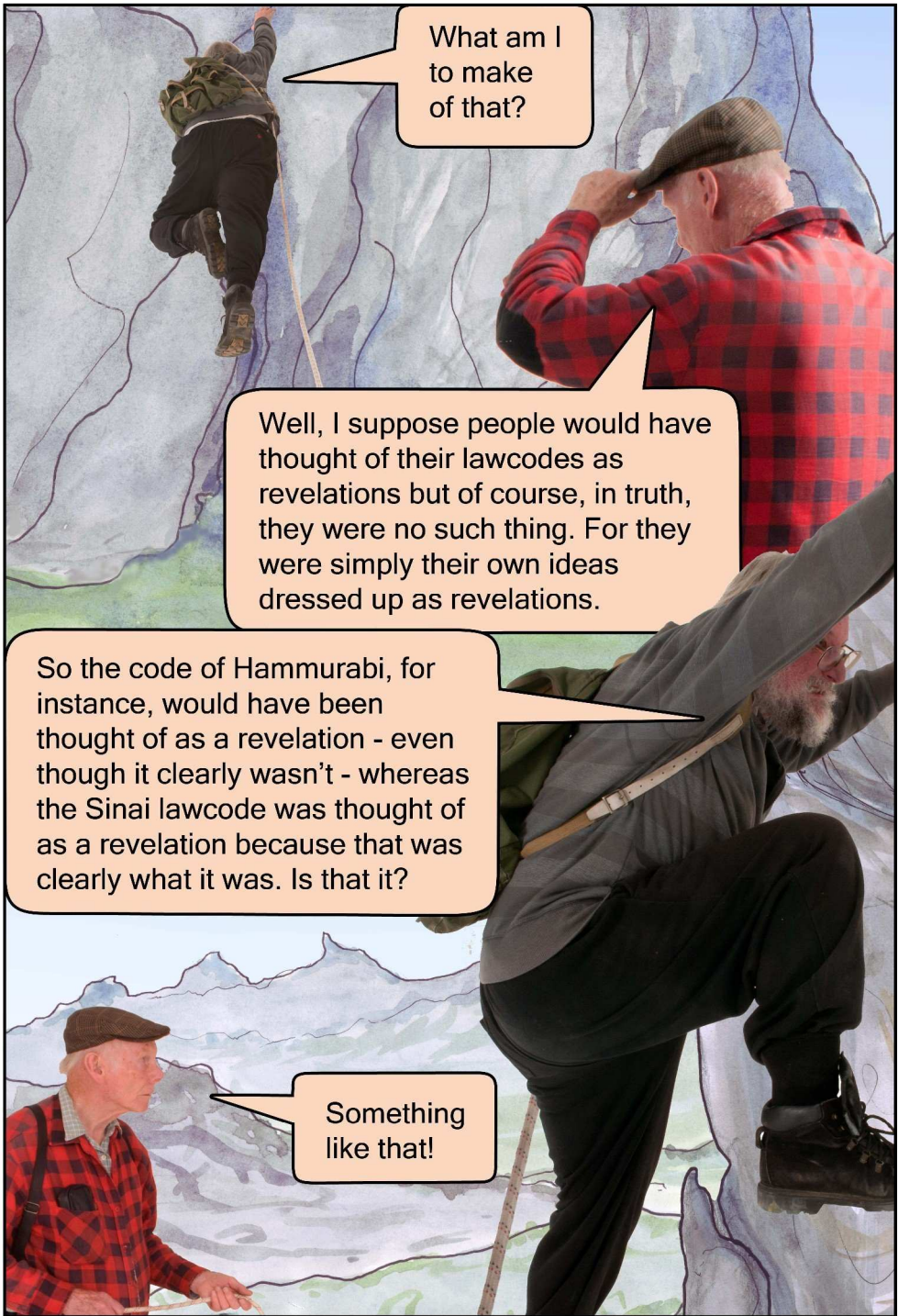
It's usually seen as a revelation in which God clearly explains to people how they are supposed to behave.



So it's a 'Godly revelation' is it?  
Is that how you understand all of the lawcodes in the ancient world: Godly revelations?

I suppose so!  
I don't know!  
Perhaps not!





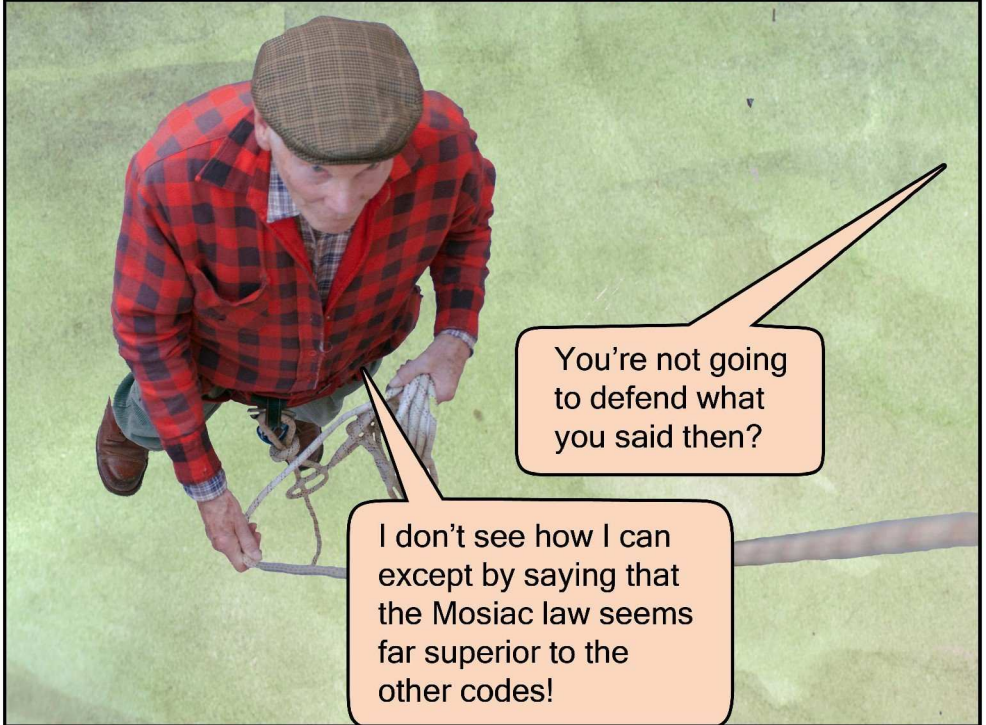
What am I  
to make  
of that?

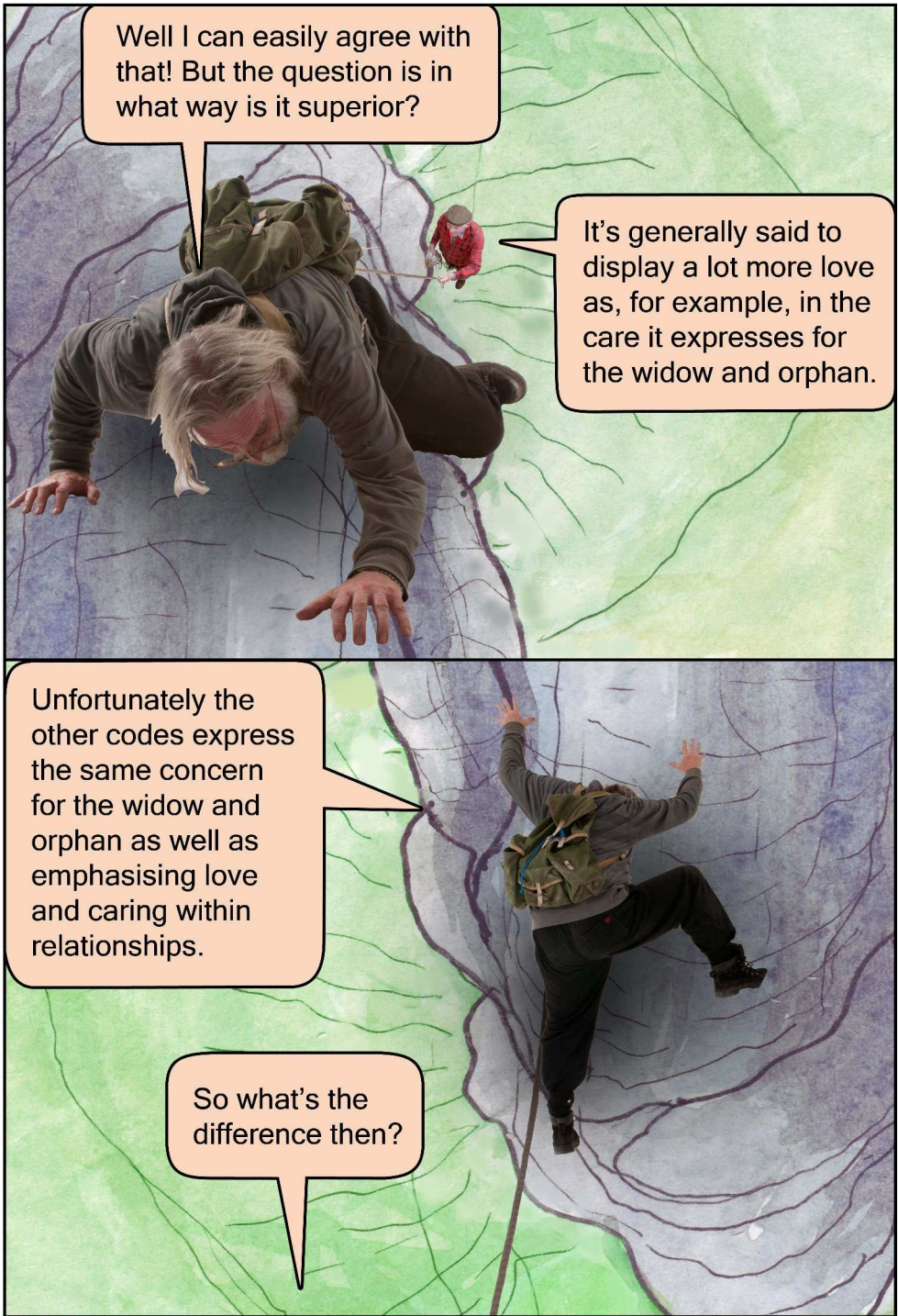
Well, I suppose people would have  
thought of their lawcodes as  
revelations but of course, in truth,  
they were no such thing. For they  
were simply their own ideas  
dressed up as revelations.

So the code of Hammurabi, for  
instance, would have been  
thought of as a revelation - even  
though it clearly wasn't - whereas  
the Sinai lawcode was thought of  
as a revelation because that was  
clearly what it was. Is that it?

Something  
like that!

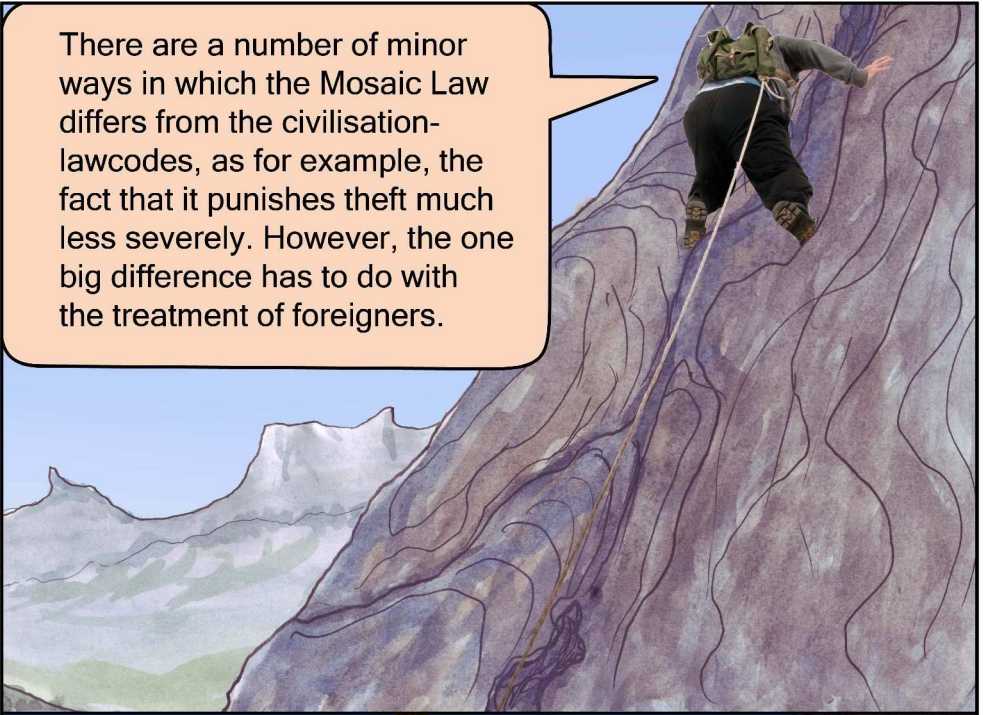








There are a number of minor ways in which the Mosaic Law differs from the civilisation-lawcodes, as for example, the fact that it punishes theft much less severely. However, the one big difference has to do with the treatment of foreigners.

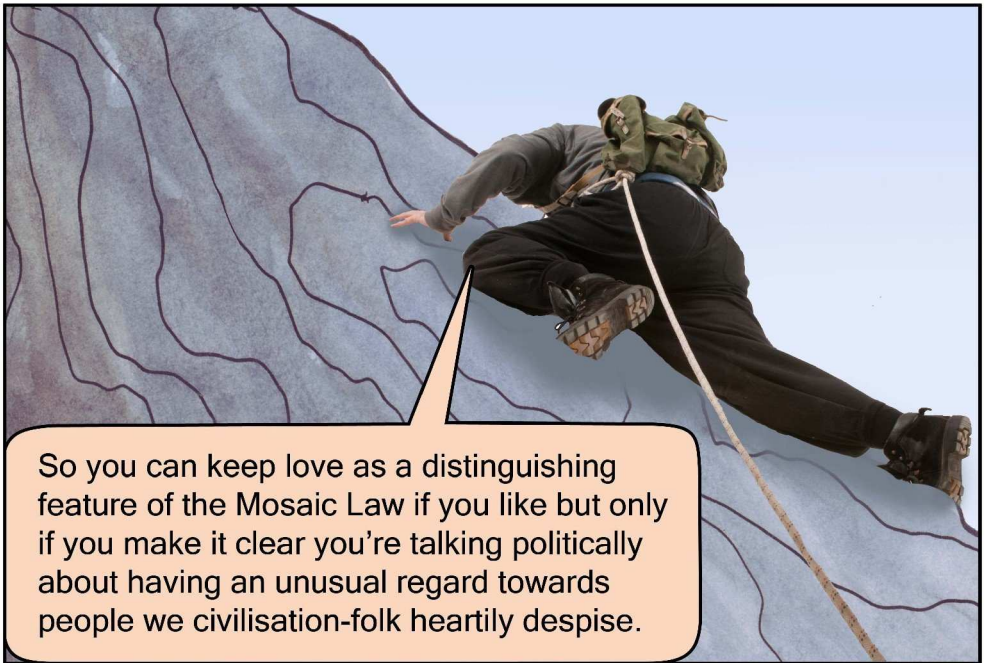


As is generally the case in our own communities today, ancient civilisations treated foreigners as fair game, unless they were specifically protected by treaties between civilisation-powers.

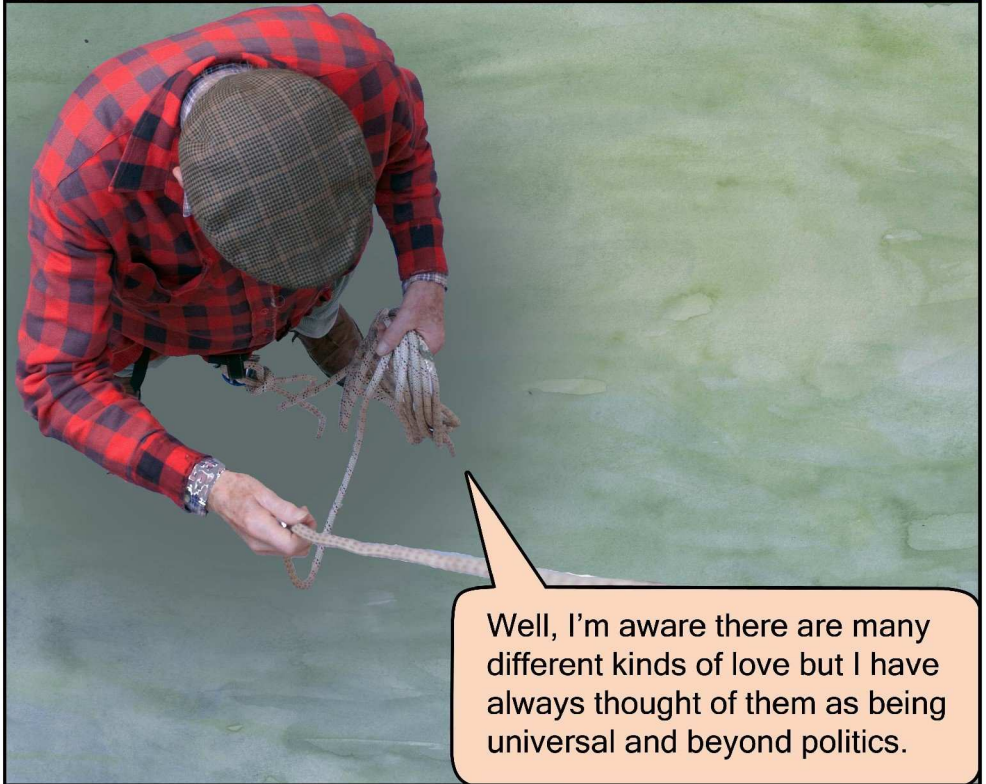


In sharp contrast, there are numerous passages in the Mosaic Law where it is strictly forbidden to exploit foreigners or treat them differently from other members of the community.

Already in the patriarchal stories we found the storyteller using the protection of foreigners to symbolise the Hebrew ideology and now the Law of Moses confirms this view of the world.



So you can keep love as a distinguishing feature of the Mosaic Law if you like but only if you make it clear you're talking politically about having an unusual regard towards people we civilisation-folk heartily despise.



Well, I'm aware there are many different kinds of love but I have always thought of them as being universal and beyond politics.



If that's the case, you've been deluding yourself! For manifestly, people's ideological perspectives colour their ideas especially politically important ones like love.

So how do these conservative and marginal ideologies make love look different?

Conservative love is characteristically condescending and it is usually spoken of as graciousness. We will find this 'quality' honoured in the Bible but only in revisionist texts.



Condescending love is capable of having a regard for foreigners, of course, but only out of pity.



Marginal love, on the contrary, actually values foreigners for what they are... something conservative love is incapable of doing... as we civilisation-folk demonstrate all the time.



15

## The Golden Calf





Perhaps we should get back to the Exodus story. For if we start talking about love it will take us all day!

Very well. You've explained to me the giving of the Law. Now tell me how to understand the golden calf incident.

Ex 32

Remind me  
about what  
happened.

Moses remains ages up the mountain with God and the people become anxious so, as usual, they run to their leader which, given Moses' absence, means Aaron, the high priest.

Clearly something has  
happened to Moses.  
So, since you are now  
in charge, you must  
provide us with gods  
to lead us.

Ex 32. 1



Unlike Moses, Aaron immediately gives way to their demands.



Aaron uses the people's gold to fashion an idol in the form of a calf in front of which he builds an altar.



Consequently, when Moses comes down from the mountain, he finds the people worshipping the golden calf. So he breaks the tablets of stone on which Yahweh's Law has been written.

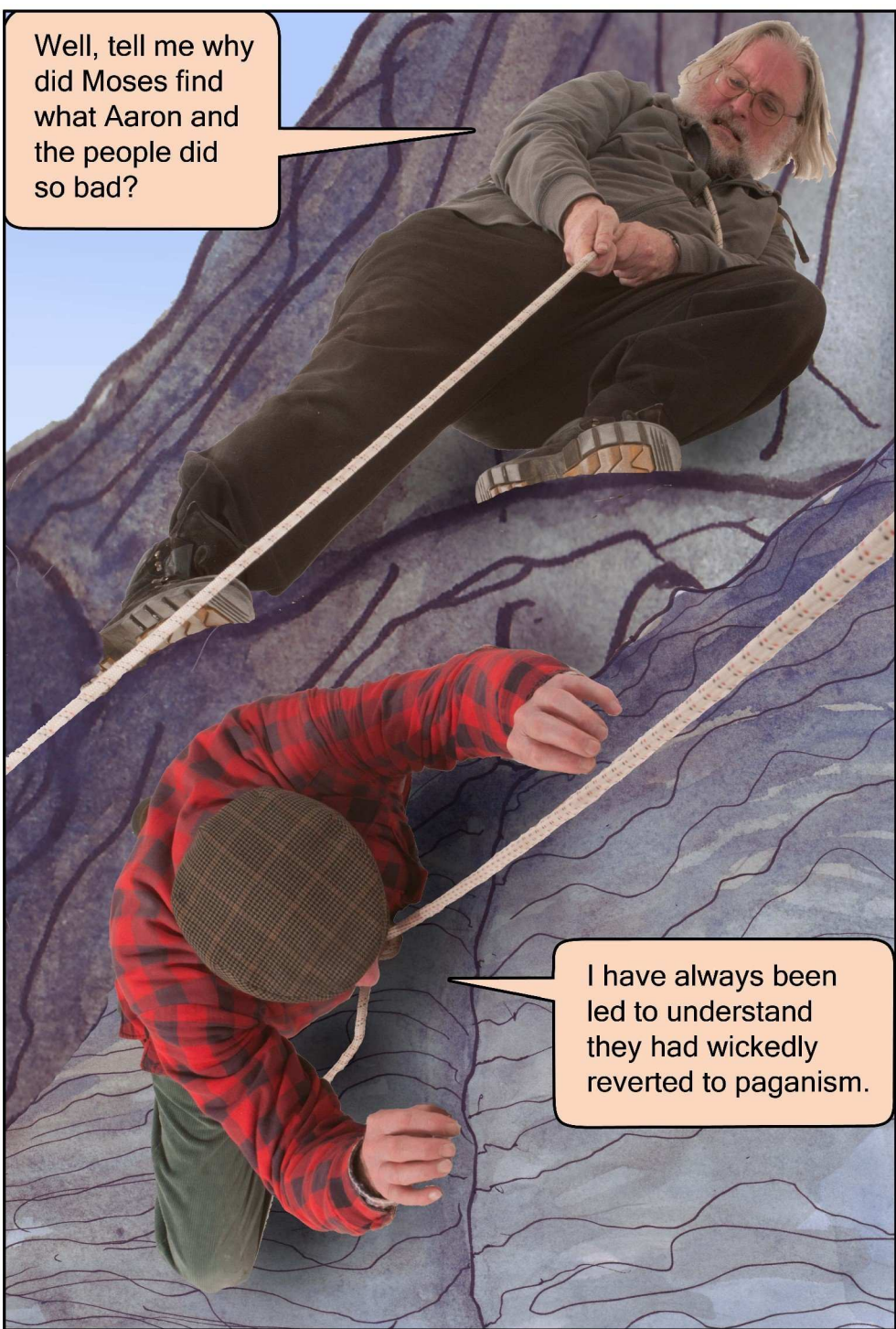


What in heaven's name .....

I know you're going to tell me that a lot of this story is symbolic but even if it is what does it mean?





A man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a grey hoodie and black pants, is climbing a thick white rope. He is looking down at a boy who is also climbing the rope. The boy is wearing a red and black plaid shirt, green pants, and a brown flat cap. The background is a stylized, purple and blue mountain range. The man is holding the rope with both hands, and the boy is holding it with one hand. The rope is taut and runs diagonally across the frame.

Well, tell me why  
did Moses find  
what Aaron and  
the people did  
so bad?

I have always been  
led to understand  
they had wickedly  
reverted to paganism.

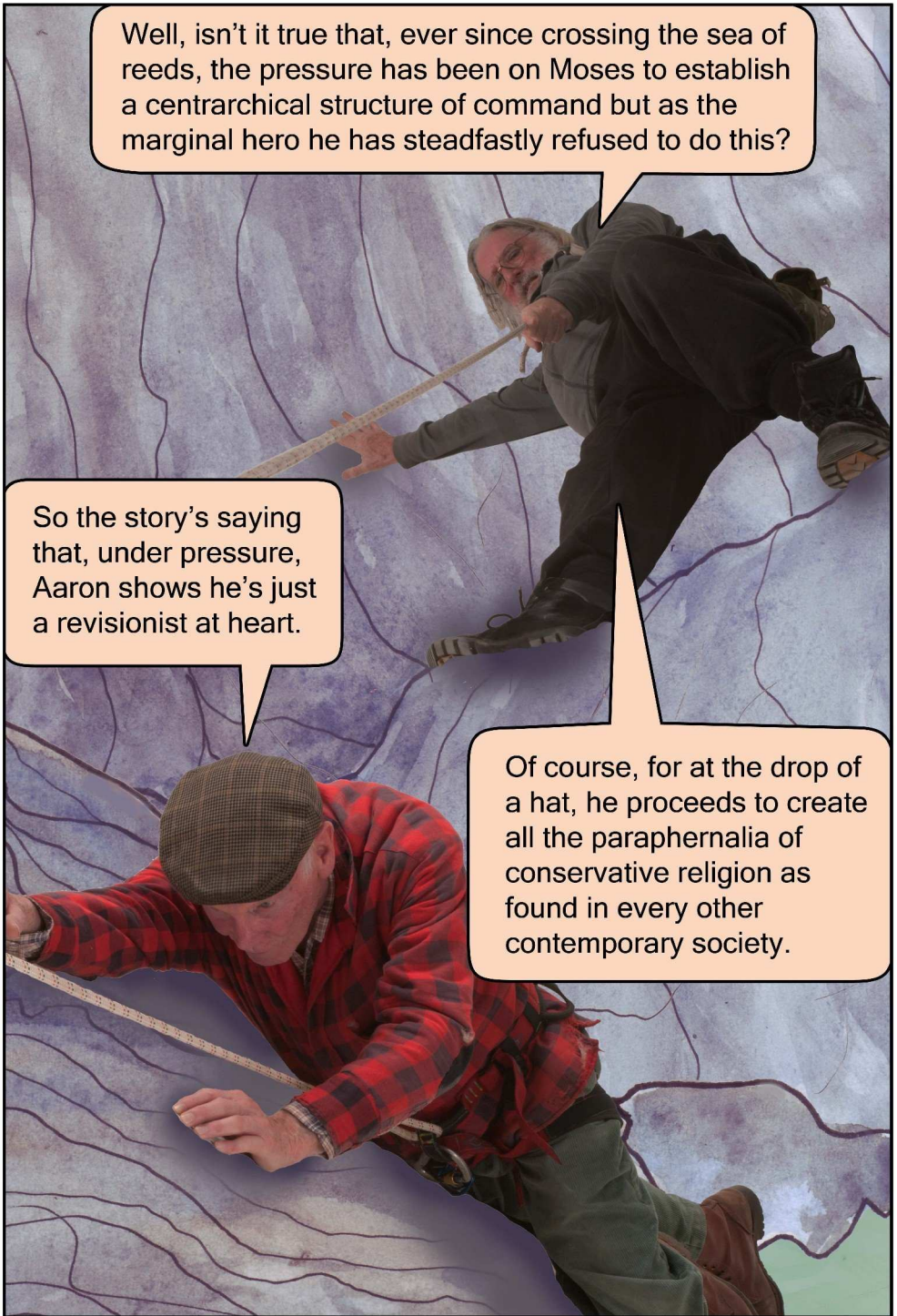


That can't be true! Aaron wasn't a novice. He was the high priest! What's more, these people were not recent converts from paganism. In any case, why would anyone be tempted to revert to paganism out here in the desert? It makes no sense!

It does seem a bit strange but I know of no better way to understand the text.

That's because you have religion on the brain. Try understanding it politically.

Fair enough but you will have to give me a hint!



Well, isn't it true that, ever since crossing the sea of reeds, the pressure has been on Moses to establish a centrarchal structure of command but as the marginal hero he has steadfastly refused to do this?

So the story's saying that, under pressure, Aaron shows he's just a revisionist at heart.

Of course, for at the drop of a hat, he proceeds to create all the paraphernalia of conservative religion as found in every other contemporary society.

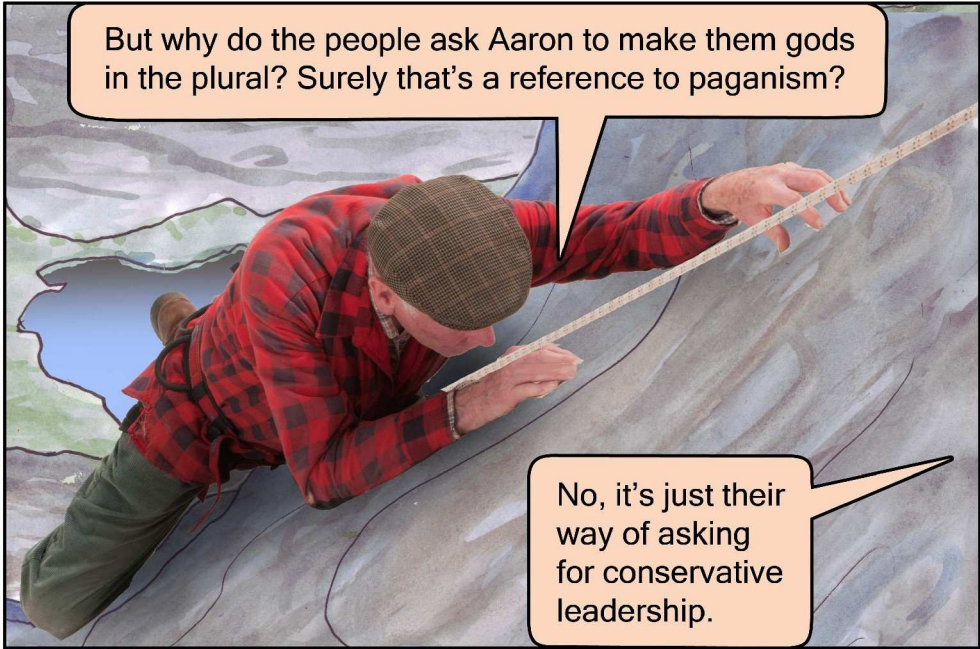


In this way, at a stroke, he undoes all of Moses' good work, a fact symbolised in the breaking of the tablets of stone.

So, as you see it, Aaron isn't changing Israel's religion.

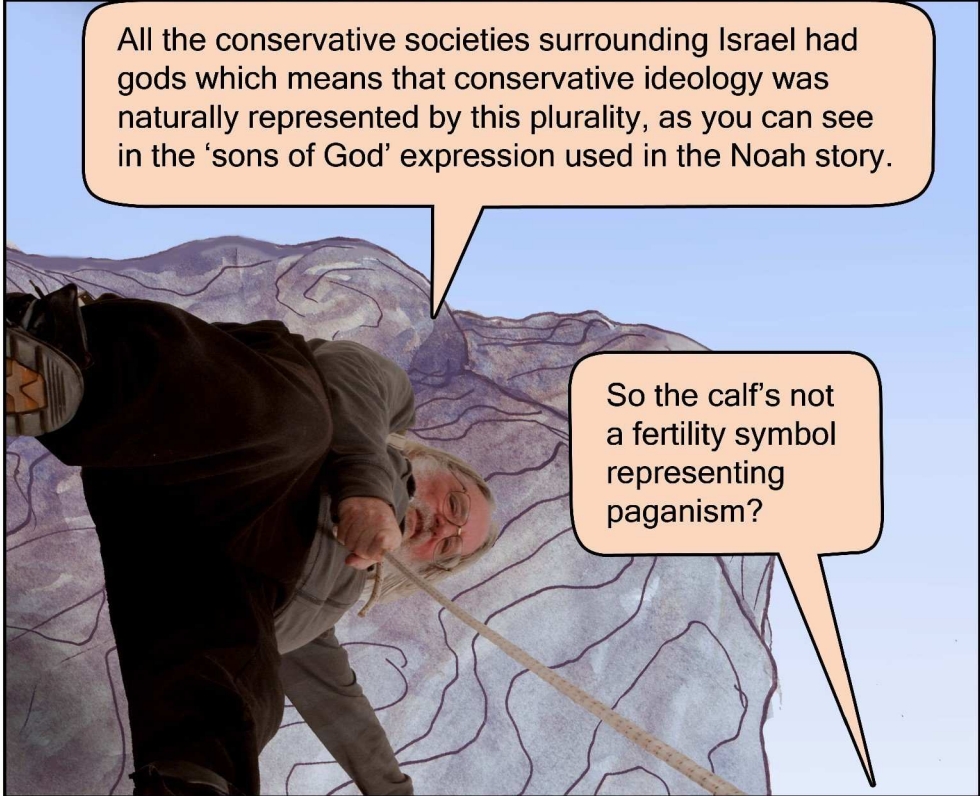
Of course not. After all, the first thing he does is to proclaim a feast to Yahweh.





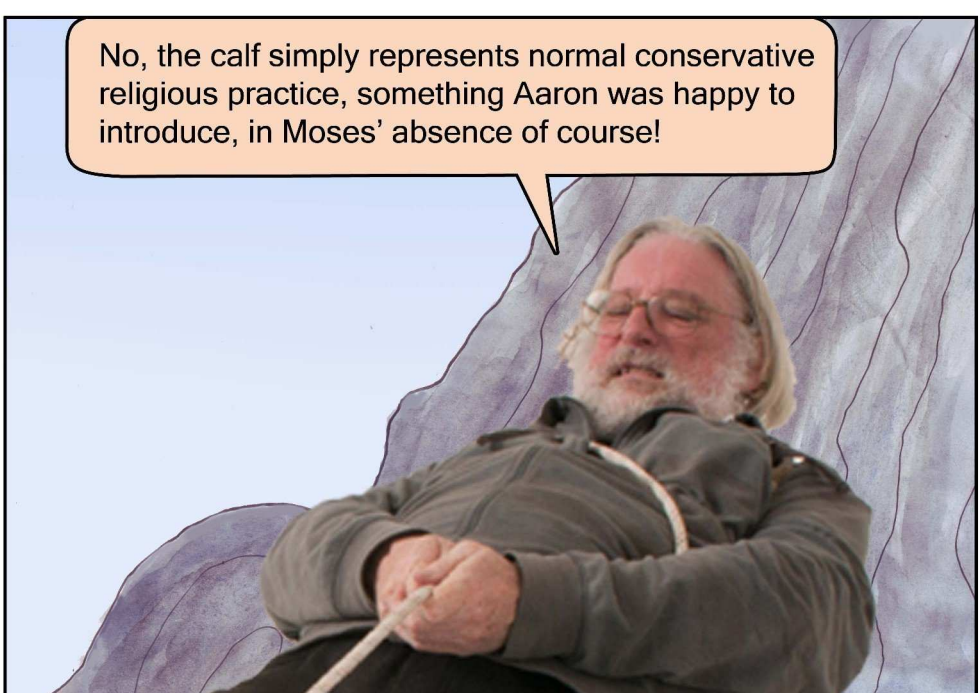
But why do the people ask Aaron to make them gods in the plural? Surely that's a reference to paganism?

No, it's just their way of asking for conservative leadership.

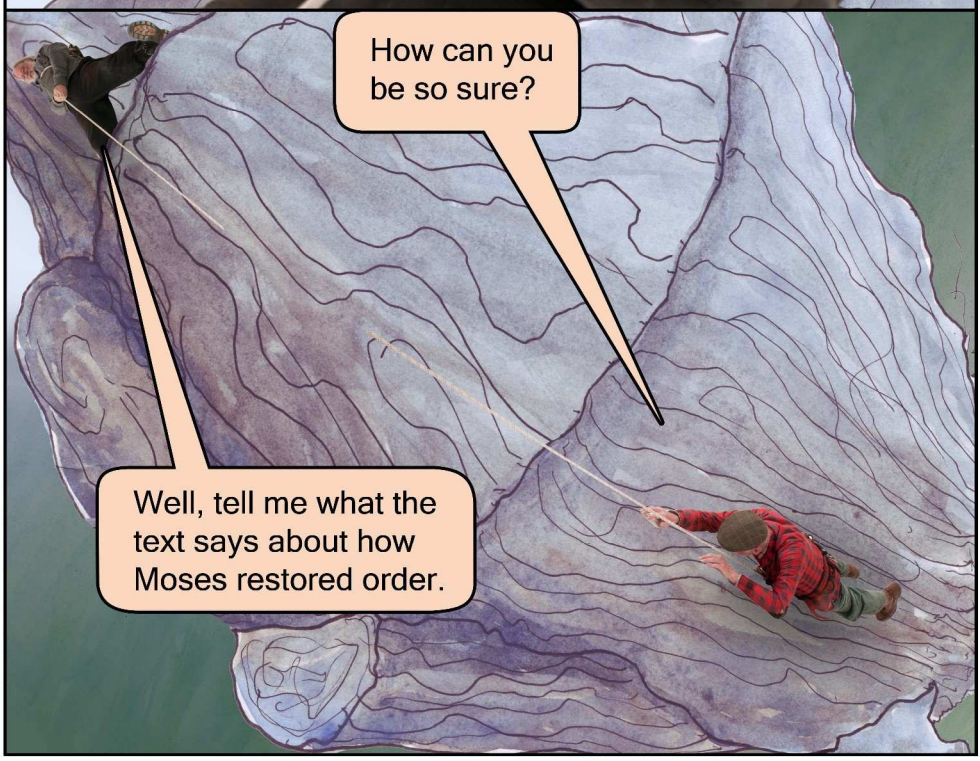


All the conservative societies surrounding Israel had gods which means that conservative ideology was naturally represented by this plurality, as you can see in the 'sons of God' expression used in the Noah story.

So the calf's not a fertility symbol representing paganism?

A man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a dark jacket, is rappelling down a large, purple-hued rock face. He is holding a rope and looking down with a slight smile.

No, the calf simply represents normal conservative religious practice, something Aaron was happy to introduce, in Moses' absence of course!

A man in a red and black plaid shirt is rappelling down a large, purple-hued rock face. He is holding a rope and looking up towards the top of the rock. Another rope is visible extending from the top left of the frame.

How can you be so sure?

Well, tell me what the text says about how Moses restored order.



It says  
he sent  
in the  
Levites  
as shock  
troops to  
massacre the  
revisionists  
and it's not  
a pretty  
picture!

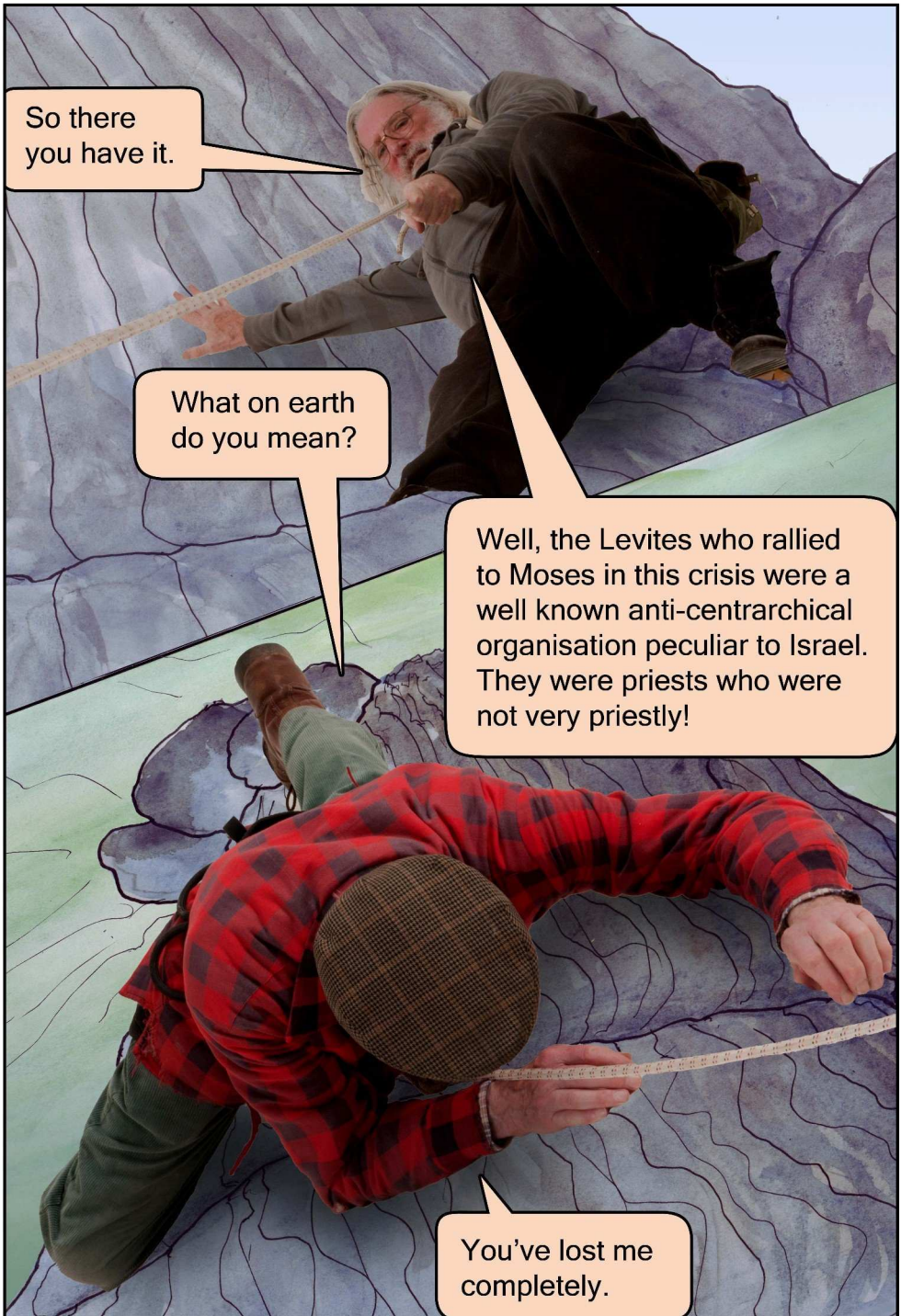
Have no mercy. Don't stay  
your hand because a traitor  
turns out to be your brother,  
your friend or your neighbour.

Ex 32. 27-29

We've killed  
the lot of them.

You have done well.  
In sacrificing your  
sons and brothers  
you have proved your  
loyalty to Yahweh.



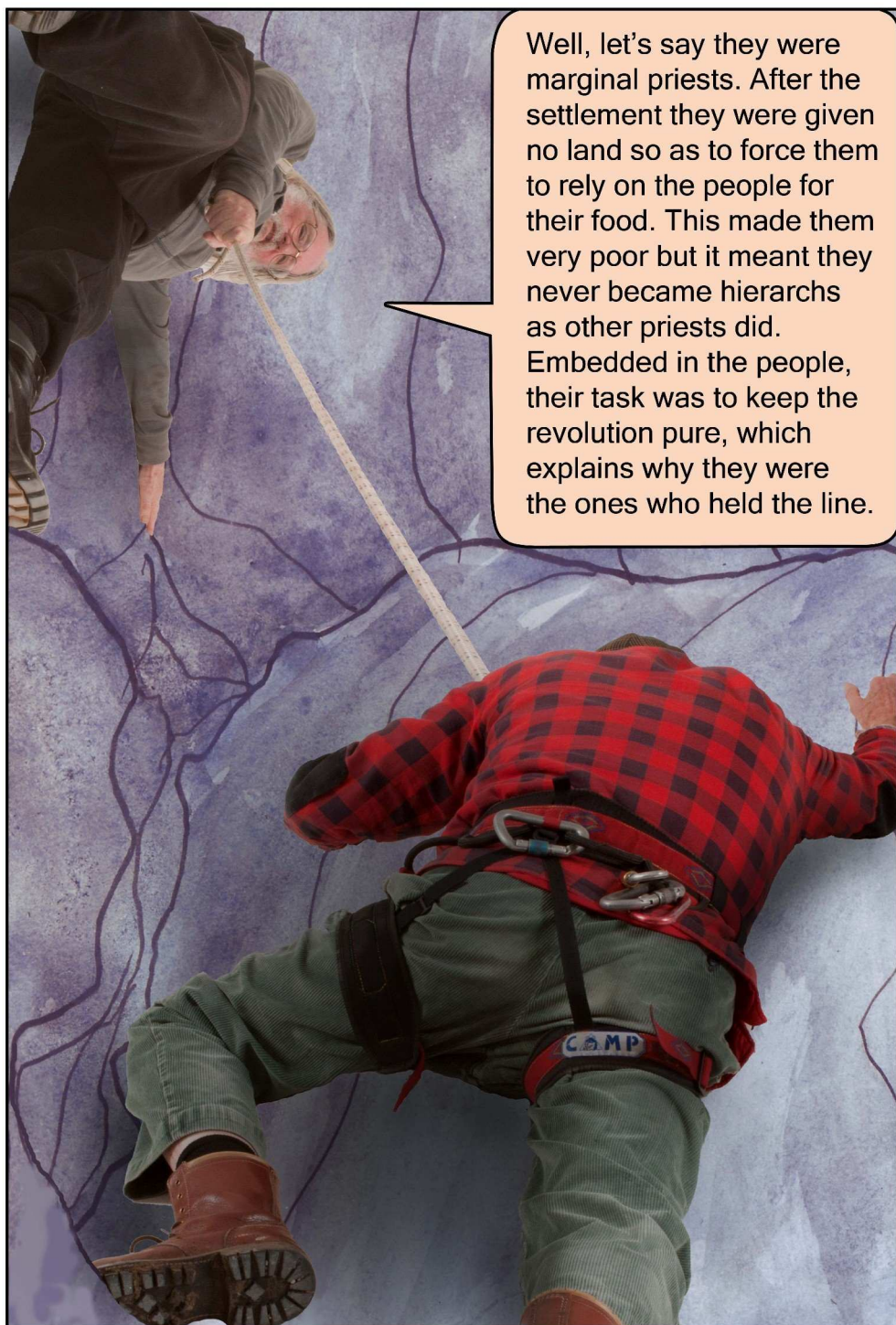


So there  
you have it.

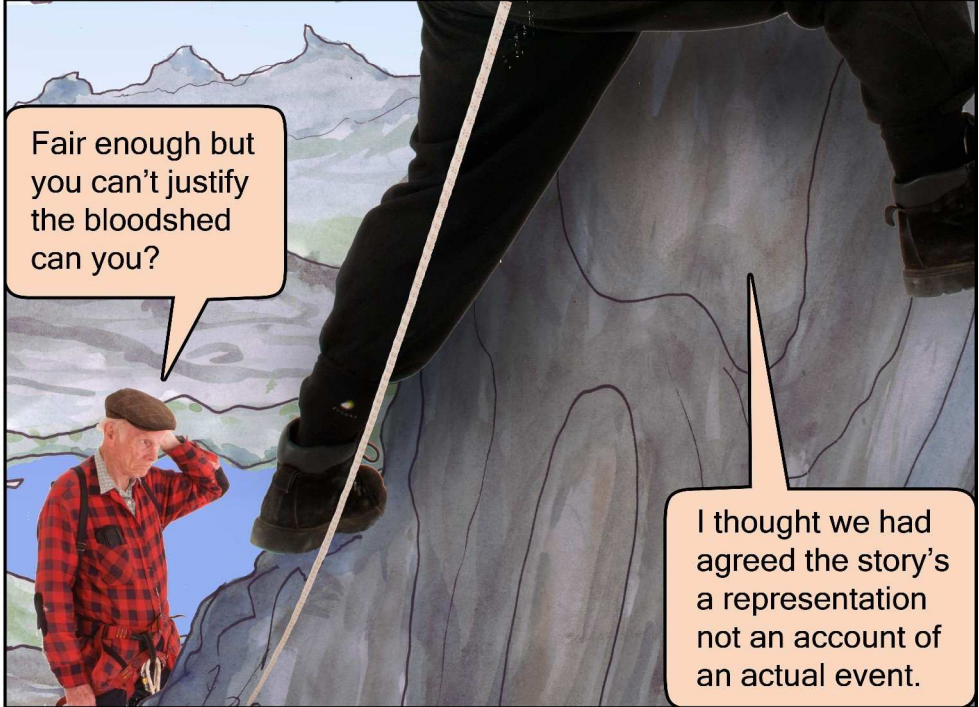
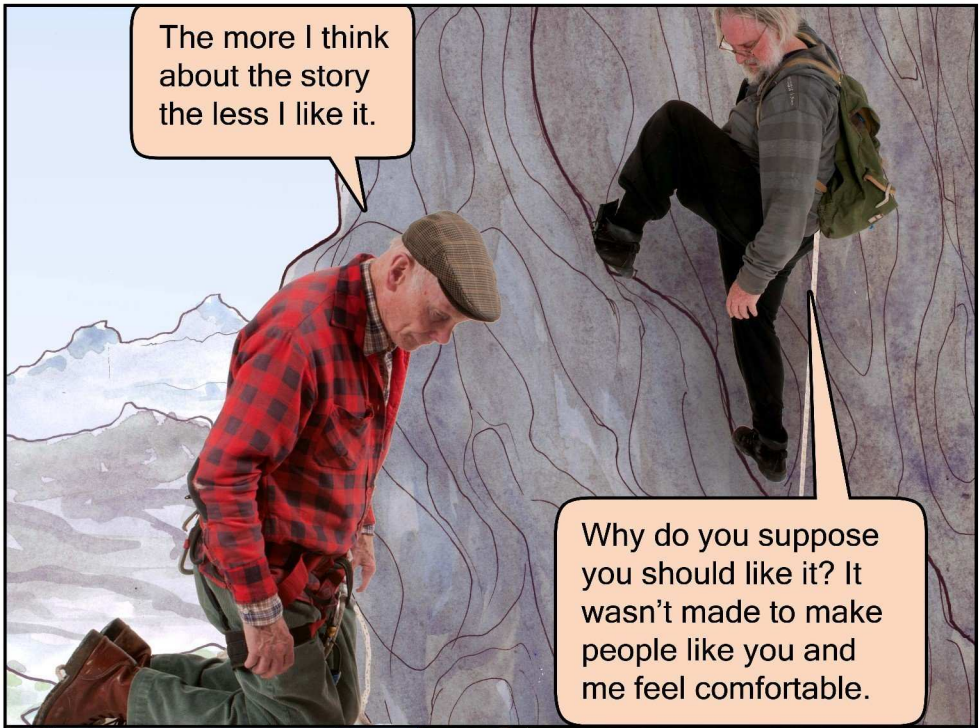
What on earth  
do you mean?

Well, the Levites who rallied  
to Moses in this crisis were a  
well known anti-centrarchical  
organisation peculiar to Israel.  
They were priests who were  
not very priestly!

You've lost me  
completely.









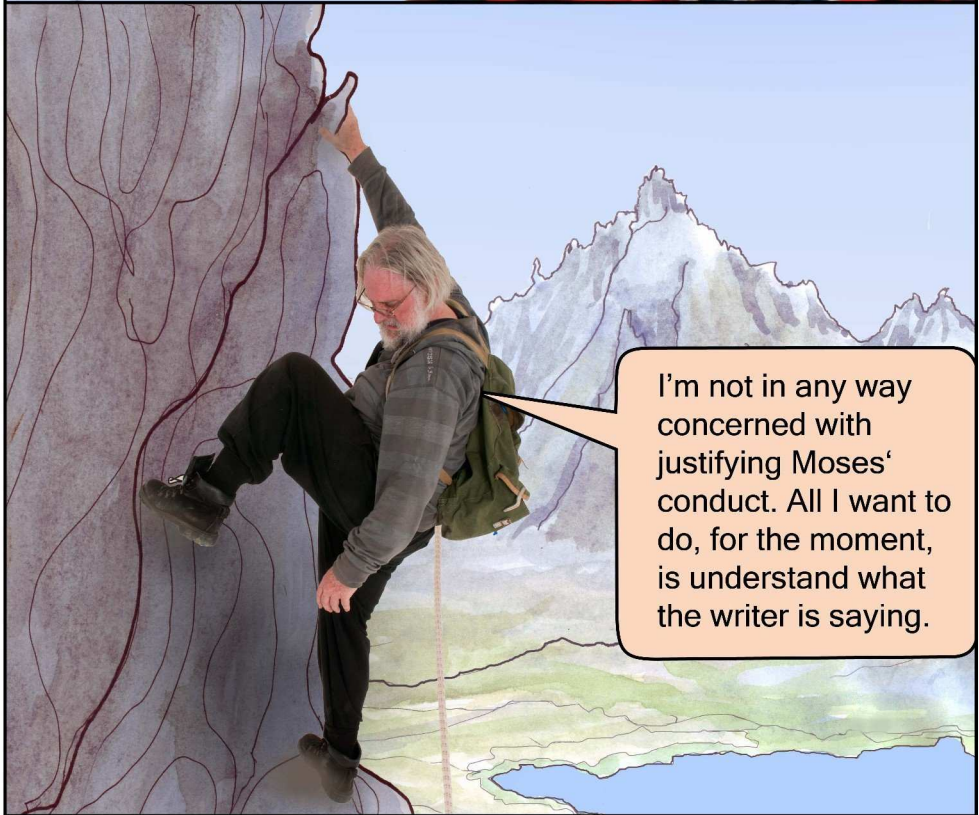
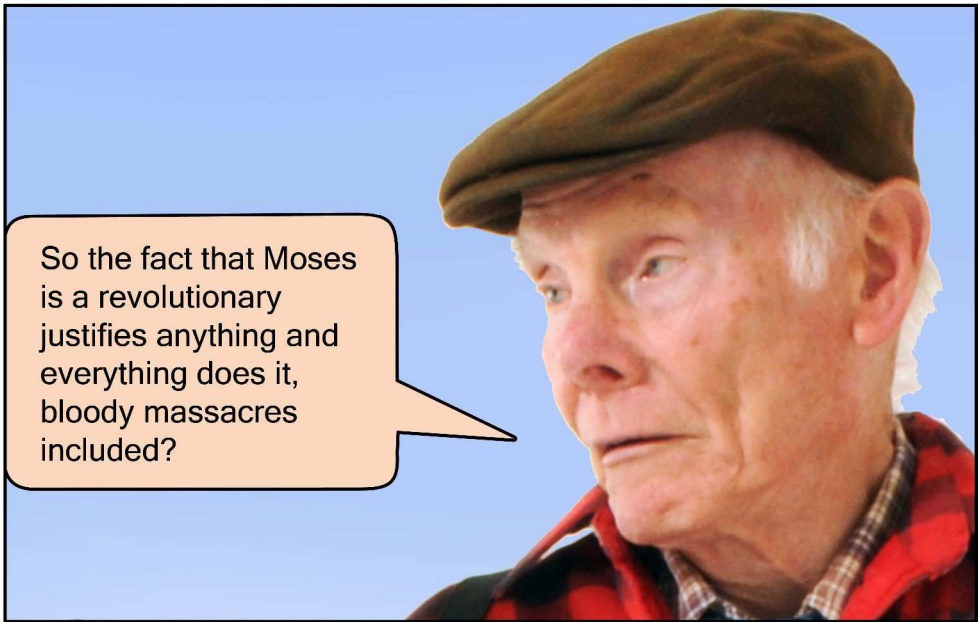


Are you suggesting  
that somehow makes  
things better?

We will only be able to  
answer that question  
when we discover what  
the story means.

Well what does it  
mean then, for  
goodness sake?

It means that nothing  
and I mean nothing  
can be worse than  
introducing centrarchical  
structures into this new  
revolutionary movement  
on which all civilisation  
depends for its future  
blessedness.





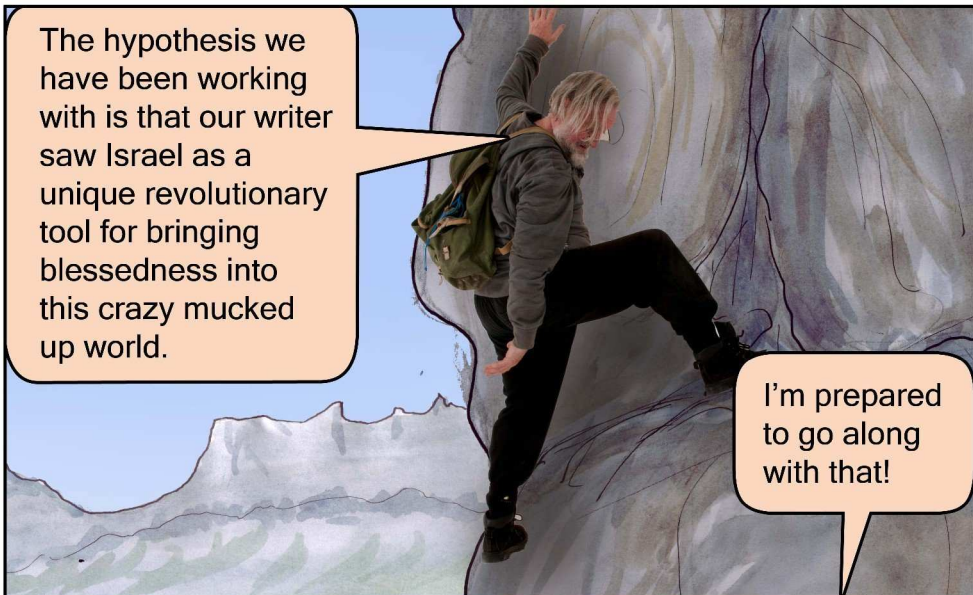
As civilisation-folk, you and I work with universal principles like 'killing people is wrong' but this does not seem to have been how this writer operated!

No, he certainly was in favour of killing some people!

Since this is the case, if we want to make sense of his story - without being obliged to approve of it, of course - surely we must first understand the perspective from which he wrote?

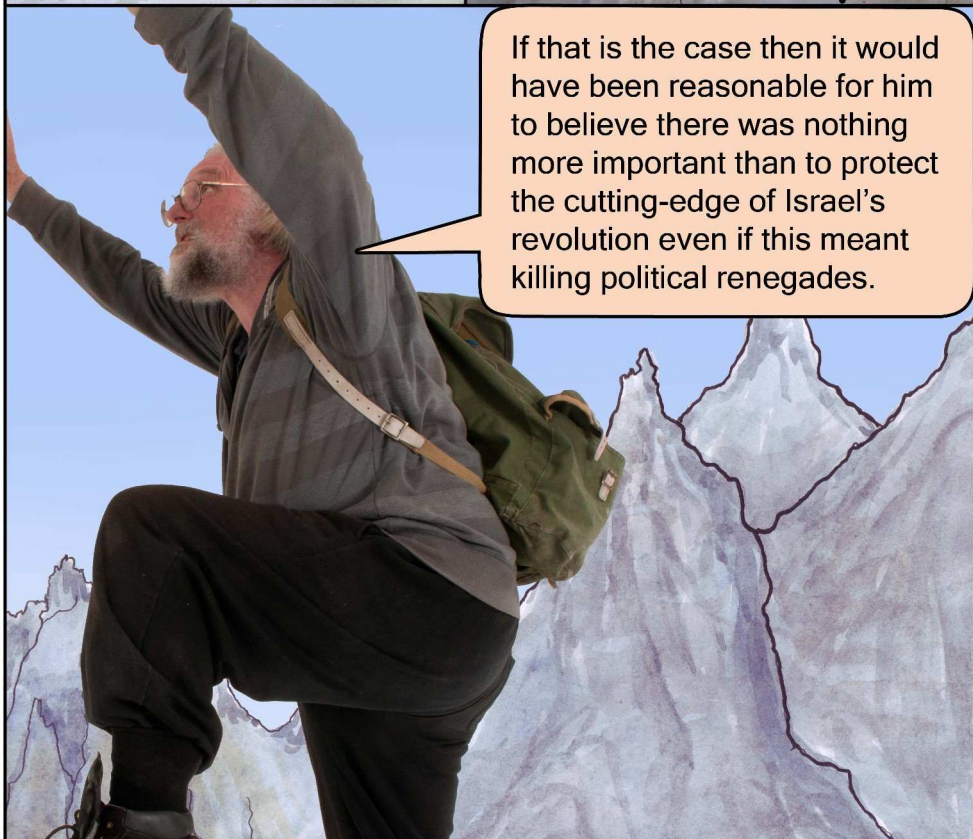
That certainly makes sense!



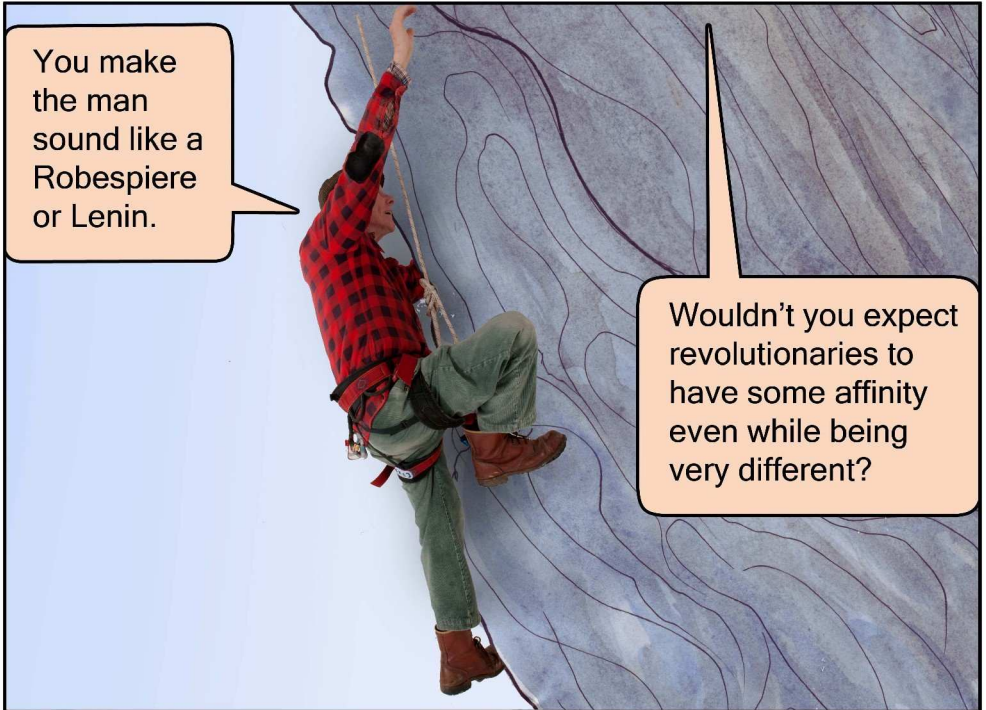


The hypothesis we have been working with is that our writer saw Israel as a unique revolutionary tool for bringing blessedness into this crazy mucked up world.

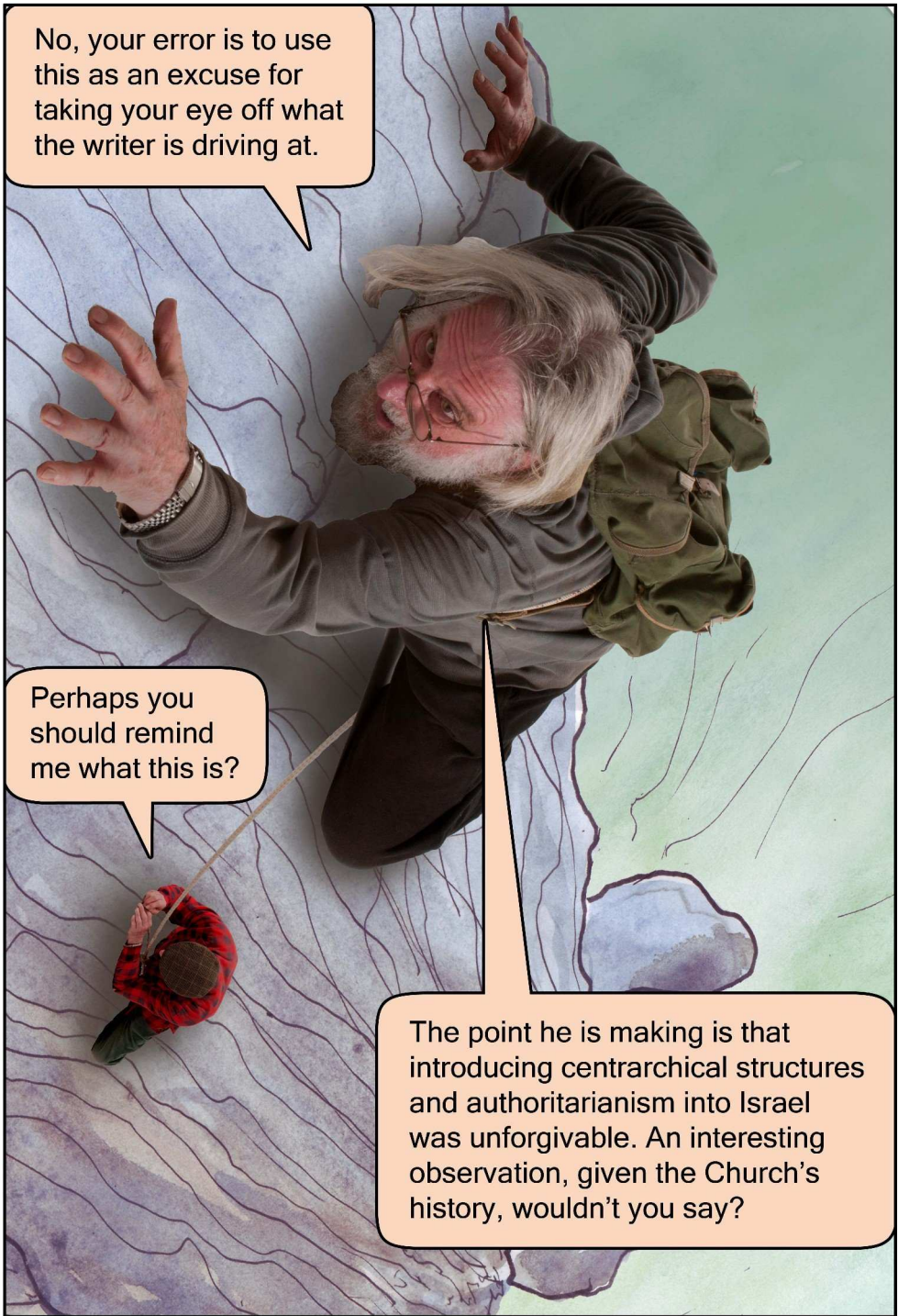
I'm prepared to go along with that!



If that is the case then it would have been reasonable for him to believe there was nothing more important than to protect the cutting-edge of Israel's revolution even if this meant killing political renegades.







No, your error is to use this as an excuse for taking your eye off what the writer is driving at.

Perhaps you should remind me what this is?

The point he is making is that introducing centrarchal structures and authoritarianism into Israel was unforgivable. An interesting observation, given the Church's history, wouldn't you say?



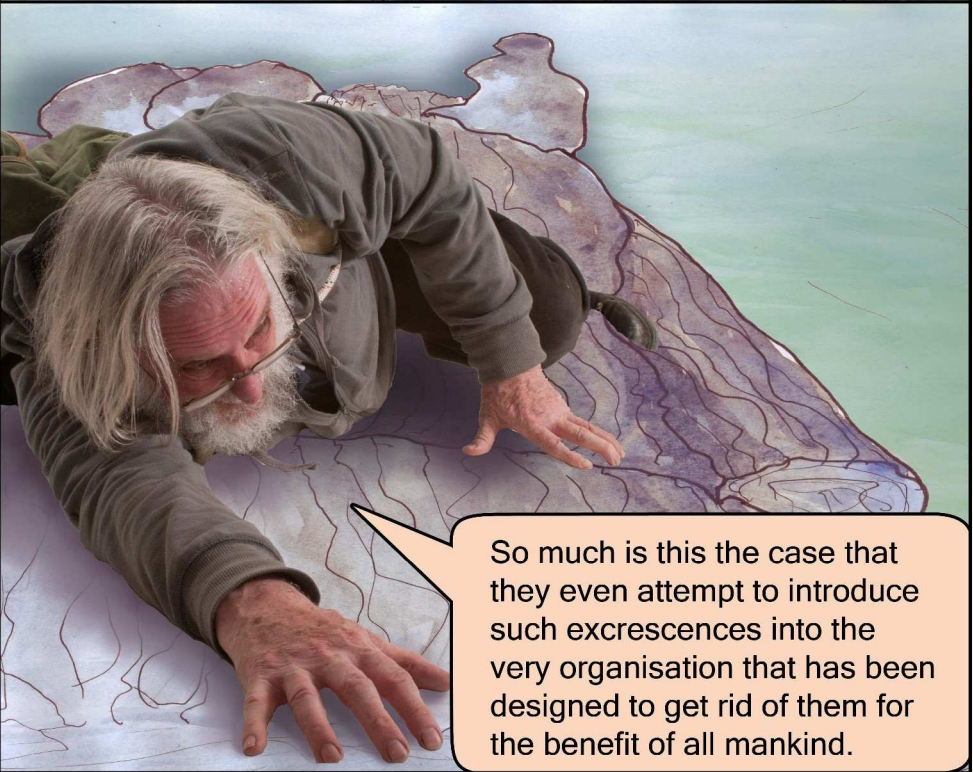
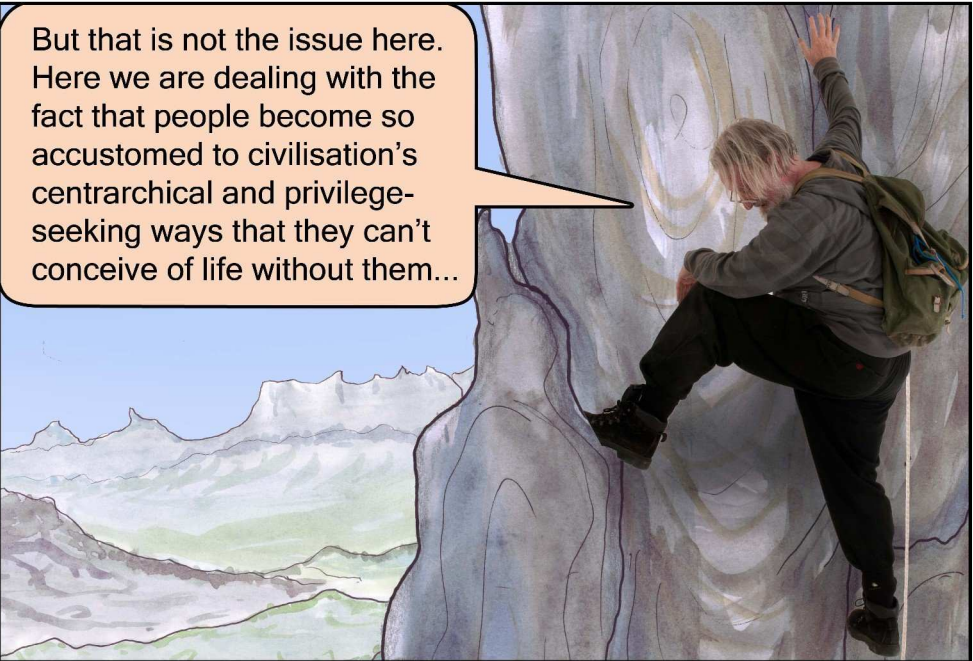
You're suggesting the Church's hierarchical organisation and authoritarian ways are unforgivable back-tracking according to this story?

What else?

What about the bloodthirstiness? Have you anything to add on that?

Well, it constituted a terrible problem and the Hebrews only faced up to it much later as we will see when we come to deal with Isaiah and Jesus.

But that is not the issue here.  
Here we are dealing with the  
fact that people become so  
accustomed to civilisation's  
centrarchical and privilege-  
seeking ways that they can't  
conceive of life without them...



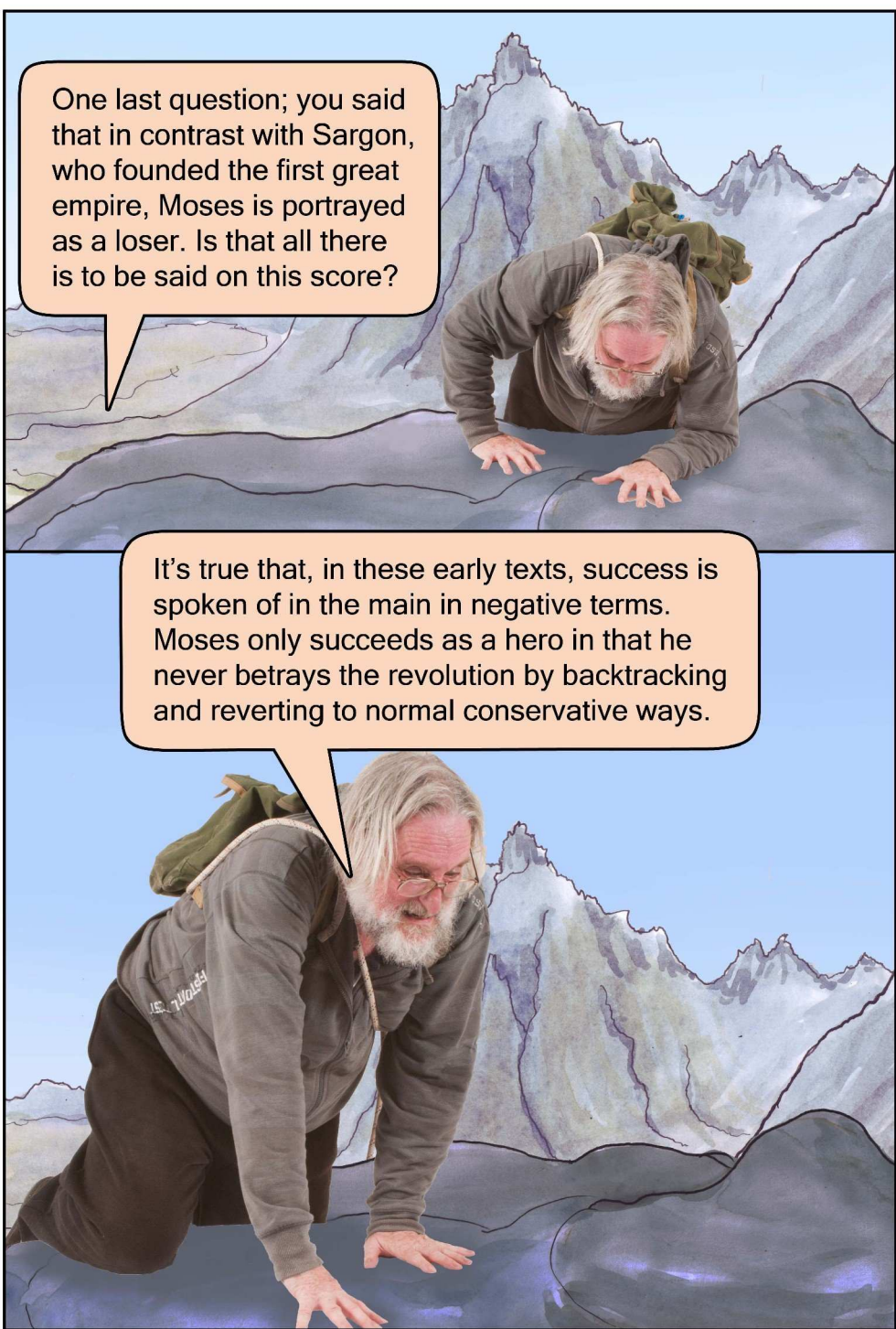
So much is this the case that  
they even attempt to introduce  
such excrescences into the  
very organisation that has been  
designed to get rid of them for  
the benefit of all mankind.

16

# Moses as a Loser



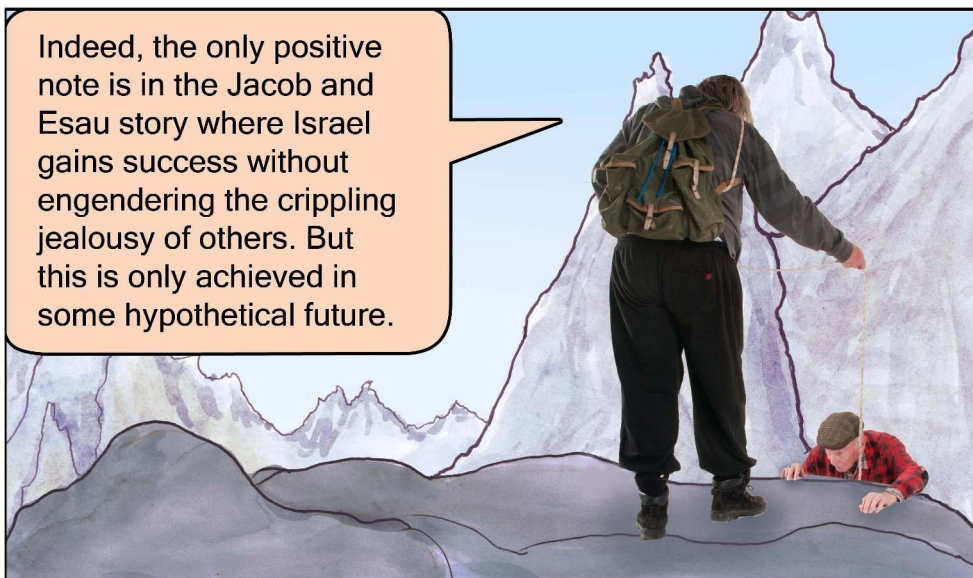




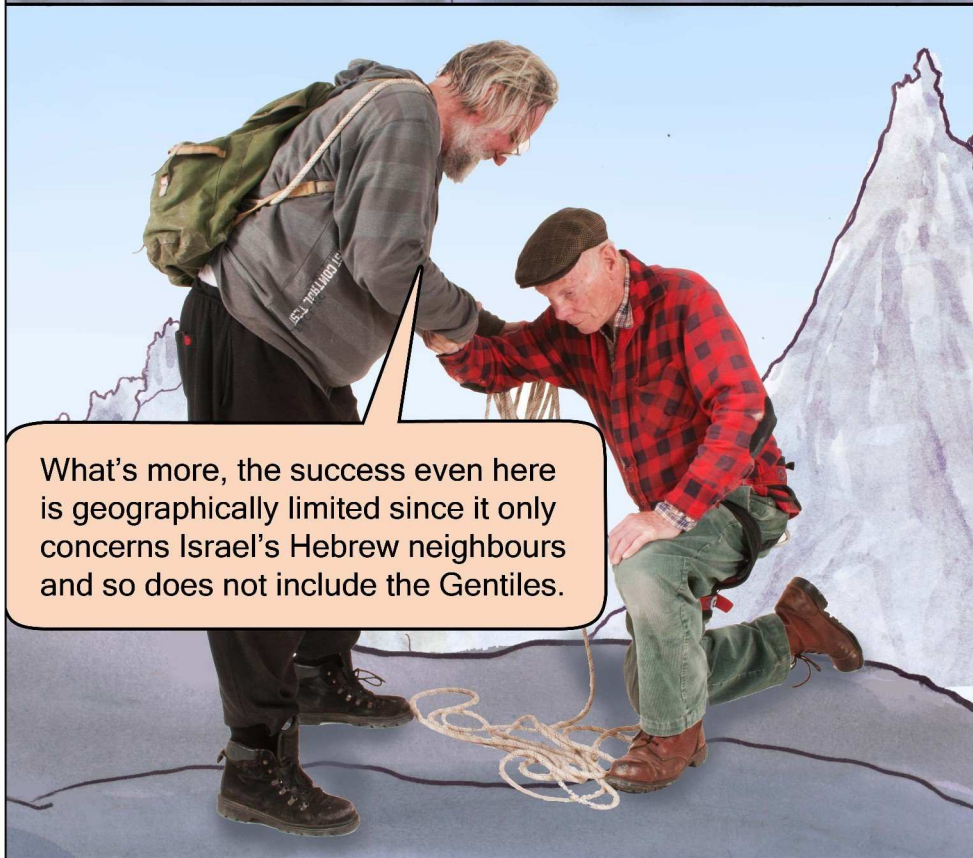
One last question; you said that in contrast with Sargon, who founded the first great empire, Moses is portrayed as a loser. Is that all there is to be said on this score?

It's true that, in these early texts, success is spoken of in the main in negative terms. Moses only succeeds as a hero in that he never betrays the revolution by backtracking and reverting to normal conservative ways.

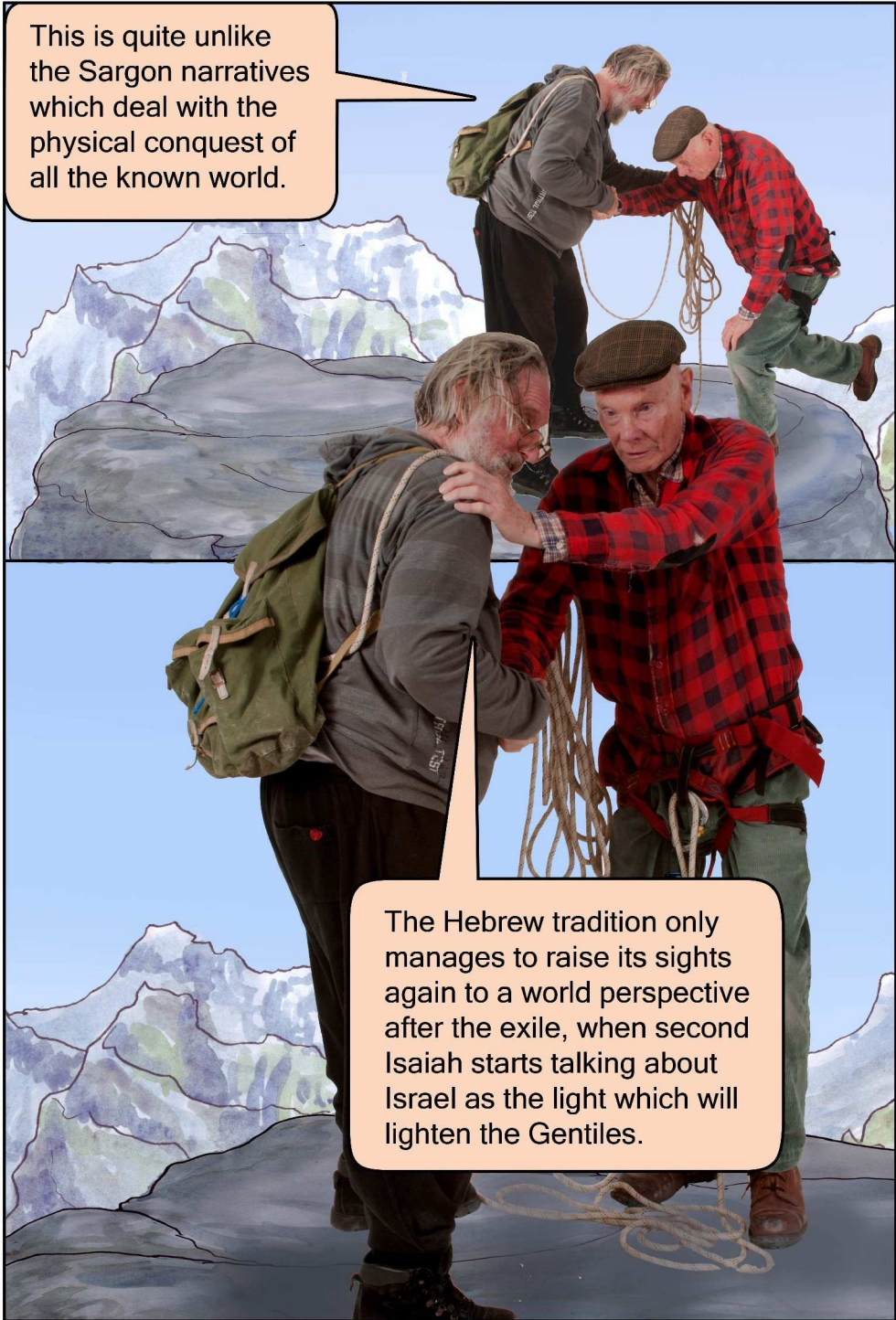
Indeed, the only positive note is in the Jacob and Esau story where Israel gains success without engendering the crippling jealousy of others. But this is only achieved in some hypothetical future.



What's more, the success even here is geographically limited since it only concerns Israel's Hebrew neighbours and so does not include the Gentiles.



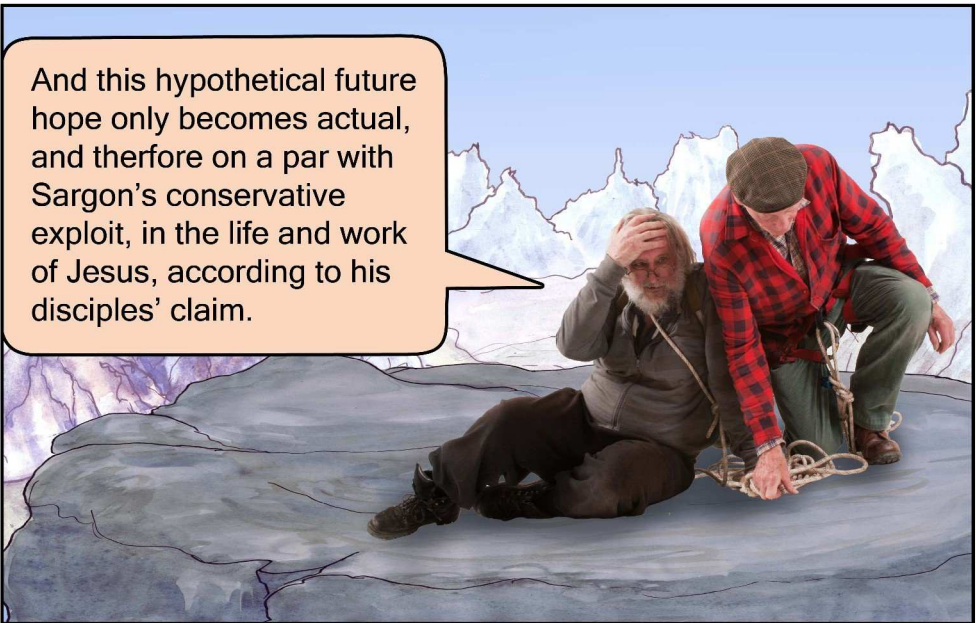




This is quite unlike  
the Sargon narratives  
which deal with the  
physical conquest of  
all the known world.

The Hebrew tradition only  
manages to raise its sights  
again to a world perspective  
after the exile, when second  
Isaiah starts talking about  
Israel as the light which will  
lighten the Gentiles.

And this hypothetical future hope only becomes actual, and therefore on a par with Sargon's conservative exploit, in the life and work of Jesus, according to his disciples' claim.

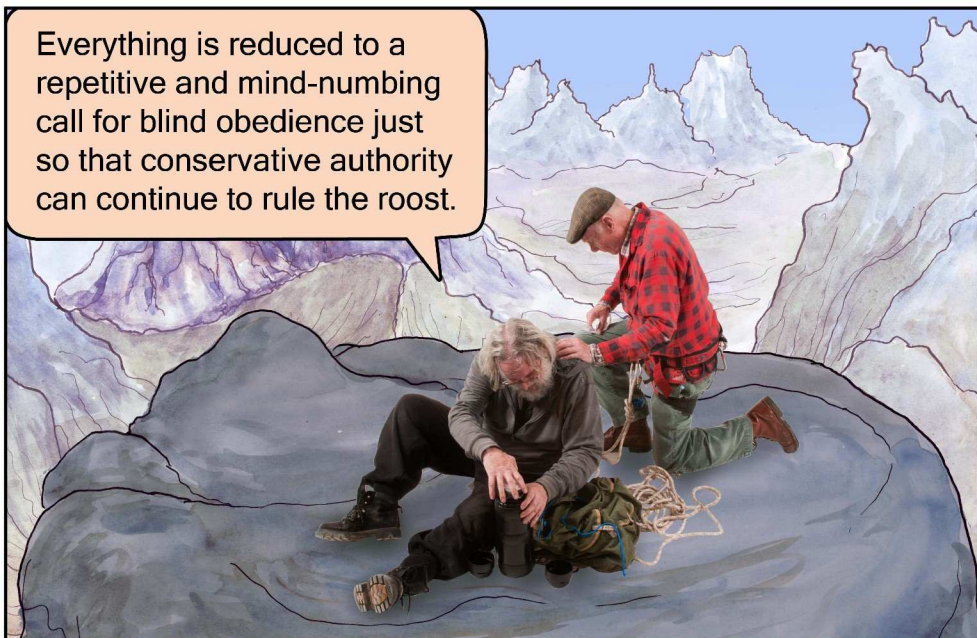


Of course, if you adopt the revisionists' religious approach to the texts, all of this fascinating conversation about how to vanquish conservative ideology so as to free the world from the oppression it creates, is obscured.





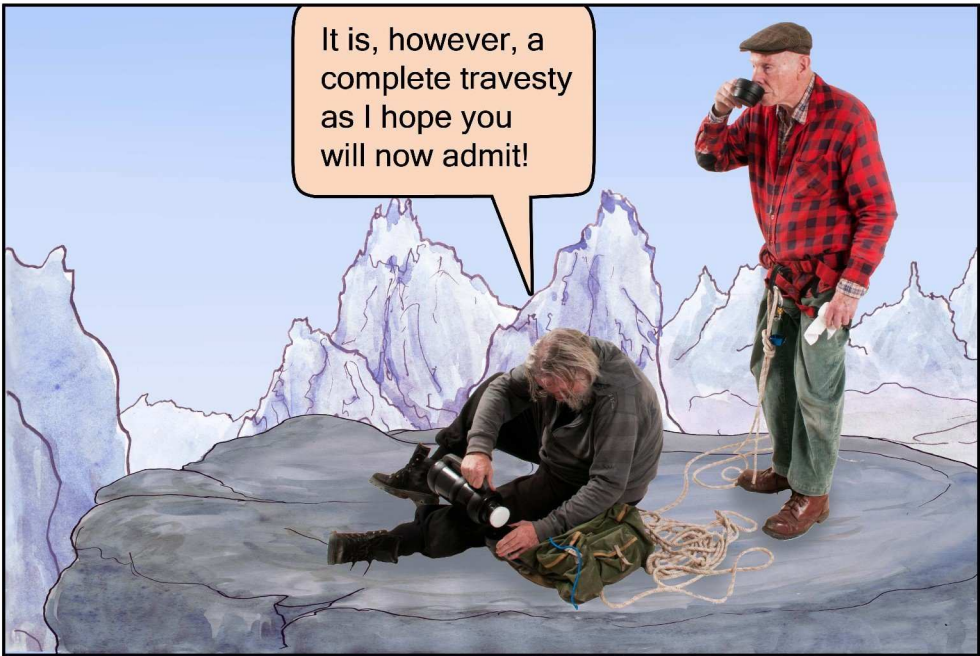
Everything is reduced to a repetitive and mind-numbing call for blind obedience just so that conservative authority can continue to rule the roost.

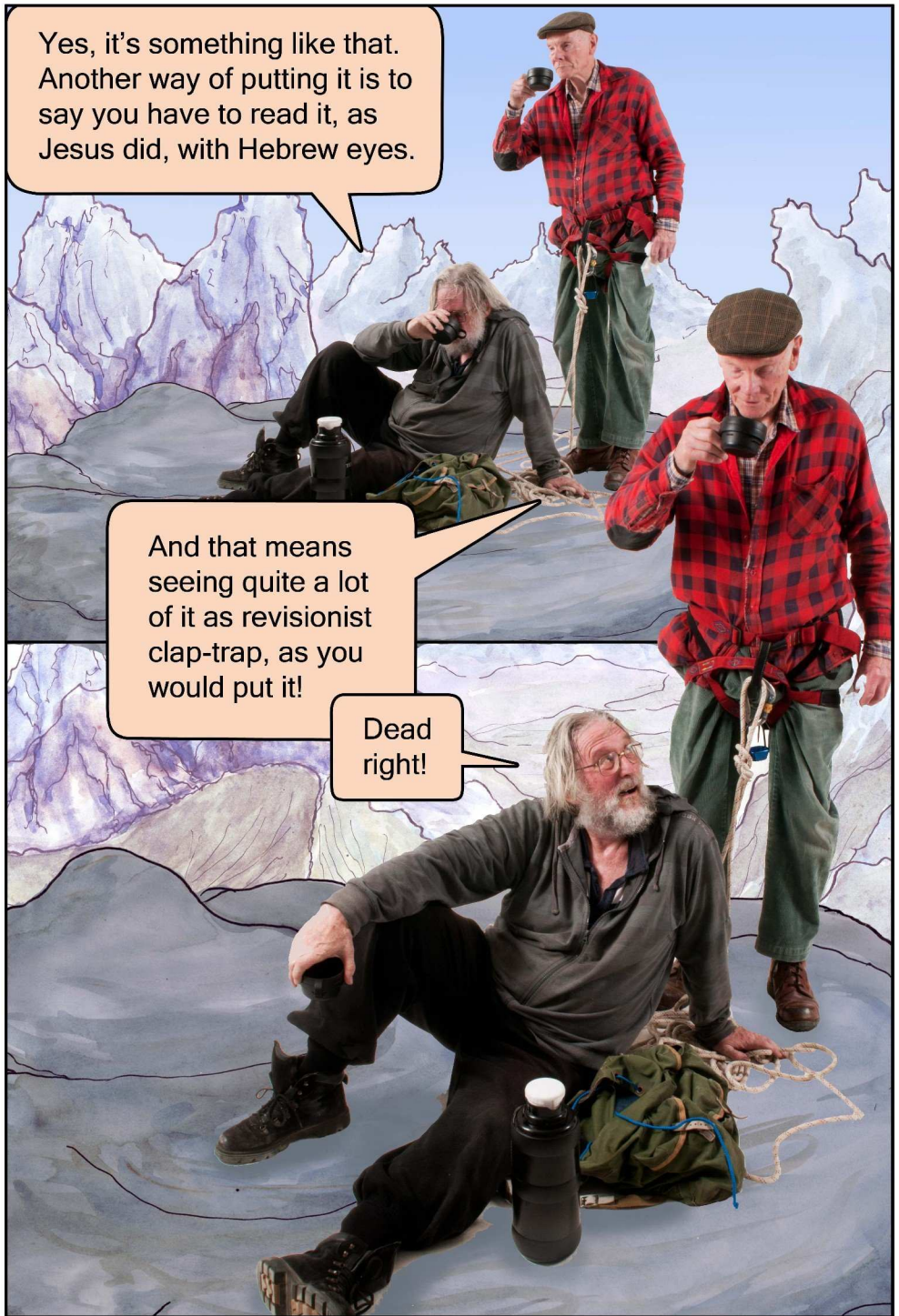


I suppose you can be forgiven for reading the Bible in this way since it is how the priestly editors wanted people to read it.









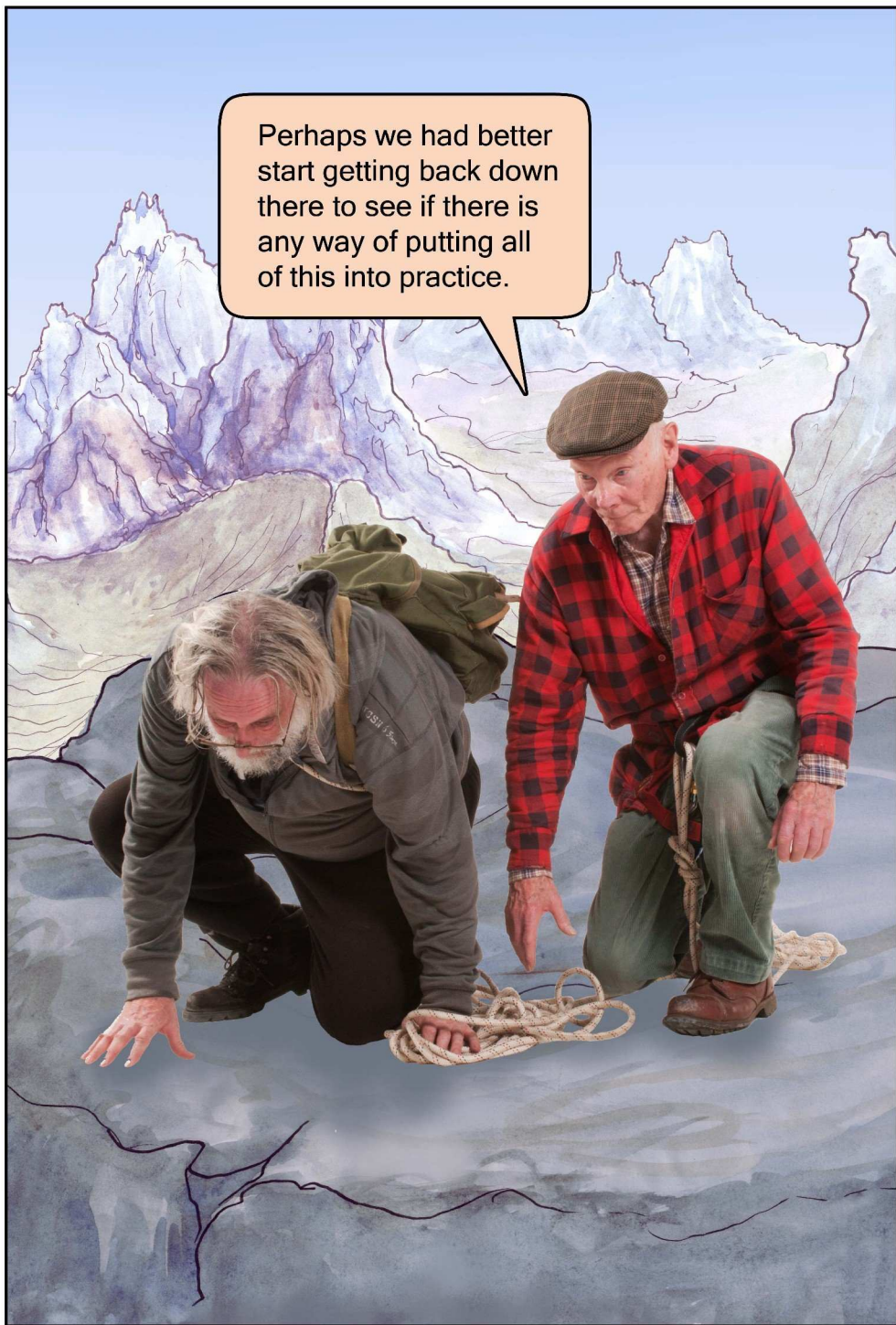
Yes, it's something like that. Another way of putting it is to say you have to read it, as Jesus did, with Hebrew eyes.

And that means seeing quite a lot of it as revisionist clap-trap, as you would put it!

Dead right!



Perhaps we had better  
start getting back down  
there to see if there is  
any way of putting all  
of this into practice.







Many thanks to all who have helped  
in the production of this book

For the great photos  
Adrian Nettleship

For modelling  
Roisin McQuaid  
Billy Key  
Ryan Partridge  
Lydia Parker  
Verene Parker  
Douglas Parker  
Jonjo McQuaid  
Rachel Parker  
William Pilkington  
Ben Szulecki  
Peter Mansfield  
Marissa Mansfield  
Sean Taylor

For help in editing  
John Rowe  
Julie Mansfield  
Pat Parker

For the use of their Studio  
Response London

For their background photos  
[Biblewalks.com](http://Biblewalks.com)

Many grateful thanks to all of you.





